

enrichment

FALL 2002

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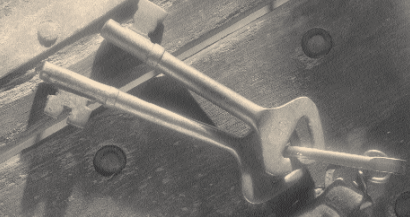
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Sunday School: Waking the Sleeping Giant

INSIDE:
COLLEGE GUIDE
6th edition





ministry matters

BY GARY R. ALLEN



I Believe in Sunday School

I believe in Sunday school, Christian education, discipleship, adult Bible fellowship, small groups, cohorts. Believers are discipled and leaders are birthed and trained in such ministries.

I am a product of Sunday school. The teachers loved and influenced me, the Bible stories formed my theology, and the motivation to grow shaped my life and ministry.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PASTOR AND THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

A healthy pastor can build a healthy church. A healthy church will have a healthy Sunday school. In fact, Sunday school may be the major contributing factor in producing a healthy church.

There are several elements of a healthy, effective Sunday school. They include:

A pastor who is passionate about training others

Sunday school will be as important to the people in the church as it is to their pastor. If the pastor is excited about Sunday school, he or she can excite others. An effective Sunday school does not just happen; it is intentional. The pastor is the key to making it happen.

Empowered teachers

Sunday school teachers must be Holy Spirit powered. But they must also be trained, resourced, and empowered by the pastor to train others. The pastor must release qualified teachers to teach from their heart of passion.

Regular, consistent encouragement and practical training will help keep Sunday school teachers teaching. When they feel valuable to the mission of the church, they are willing to assume greater responsibility, be accountable, and make necessary adjustments to keep their ministry effective. When teachers have a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment, they will be more committed and faithful.

Excited, lifelong students

People enjoy learning. We must encourage, inspire, and motivate them to be lifelong learners. As the pastor models consistent learning and growing, the congregation will follow his or her lead.

Teachers must be lifelong learners. When they have opportunities to grow in their skills and feel they are effective in motivating their students, teachers remain excited about teaching.

Great curriculum

We have the finest. Radiant Life curriculum and materials are the envy of most other Pentecostal movements. In fact, many of them have discontinued their own printing and now purchase Radiant Life. It is essential that Pentecostal churches use Pentecostal curriculum. Our students deserve the best. Provide them with the best.

Adequate facilities

Most of our churches cannot afford new facilities and may often minister in less than ideal conditions. But what you

have can be attractive. It is essential that your facilities be clean (even smell clean), neat, orderly, freshly painted, and well lit. Dark, musty rooms that are jammed with clutter are a detriment to an effective teaching environment.


Good equipment

Good equipment does not make a good teacher, but it will enhance the effectiveness of any teacher. Cost is usually the greatest hindrance to the smaller church in securing up-to-date equipment. Make the most of what you have. Overheads, blackboards, white boards, or butcher paper can help convey the message. As you are faithful and effective with what you have, God will provide better.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF SUNDAY SCHOOL?

Without Sunday school, the local church will lose its primary effectiveness in reaching, winning, and training its community. Sunday school has a vital role in helping the local church grow and thrive.

This issue of *Enrichment* is aimed at helping pastors and Christian education/discipleship ministers build a better Sunday school. I hope by the time you have finished reading this issue you will have determined to be the best Sunday school pastor you can possibly be.

Gary R. Allen, D.Min., is executive editor of *Enrichment Journal* and national coordinator of the Ministerial Enrichment Office, Springfield, Missouri. 



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Next time in *Enrichment*

Refueling Pastoral Ministry

What are the things we need to do to cooperate with God to revitalize pastoral ministry and to see a new generation flood the ministerial ranks?

Featuring perspectives by: Dan Betzer, James Bridges, Richard Dresselhaus, Ben Kauffman, H.B. London, Paul Martin, and others.

To order extra copies for your staff/volunteers or to subscribe, call 1-800-641-4310.

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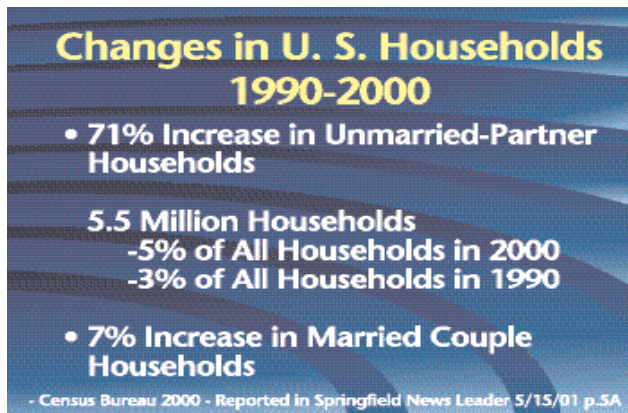
A Single Word

REACHING UNMARRIED GEN XERS

Have you noticed the growing number of unmarried young adults in their 20s and 30s today? The Census Bureau reports some alarming trends that affect the way we minister and to whom we minister. Consider these facts regarding marriage and cohabitation.

MARRIAGE

Today's young adults are postponing marriage at least 5 years longer than the boomers did. That means we must deal with the issues young single adults face—sexuality as a single adult, the need to find healthy relationships of the same and opposite sex, career choice, premarital guidance, etc.



COHABITATION

Today's single adults are choosing to live together outside of marriage more often than when today's average-aged A/G pastor (50) was growing up.

MILLION HOUSEHOLDS

Will we provide counseling and teaching on some tough and touchy issues?

- Premarital sex

- To marry or not to marry?

- Rearing children as an unmarried parent(s)
- A backslidden believer living with an unbeliever
- Counseling toward biblically moral behavior

A FEW QUESTIONS

- Have you noticed the increased numbers of unmarried Gen Xers in your community?
- Do you have many of them in your church? If not, do you wonder why?
- Are you dealing with their issues?
- Are you equipped to deal with their issues?

You have an opportunity to minister to today's Xers and millennials. How are you doing? In a single word, it's a challenge.

—Dennis Franck

History at a Glance

THE REFORMATION



485 YEARS AGO—1517

- Martin Luther, in protest against the church's material preoccupations and the sale of indulgences, posted his 95 Theses on the door of Palast Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31. This marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany. After many years of hiding, and aided by a committee of translators, Luther produced a German Bible that helped unite the German people and to

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	Men	Women
1998	26.7	25.0
1980	24.7	22.0
1970	23.2	20.8
1960	22.8	20.3

U. S. Census Bureau, Internet - Jan. 1997

Religion and Values

"UNCHURCHED" ON THE RISE?

Gallup research indicates that over almost the last quarter-century, the U.S. adult population has tended to drift away from organized religion, with the decline most pronounced among younger people and males. However, basic religious beliefs (in God, heaven, hell, etc.) remain intact.

The latest figures, based on a December 2001 Gallup survey, show roughly equal proportions of the population falling into the categories of "churched" and "unchurched" (53 percent to 47 percent, respectively).

The survey was first conducted in 1978 and 30 religious groups and denominations sponsored it. It was one of the first major investigations ever conducted into the values, interests, and backgrounds of the unchurched in America. In "The Unchurched American," a 1978 report published by the Princeton Religion Research Center on the results of this study, the "unchurched" were defined as those who answered "no" to either one or both of the following questions: "Are you a member of a church or synagogue?" or "Apart from weddings, funerals, or special holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, or Yom Kippur, have you attended the church or synagogue of your choice in the past 6 months?"

In 1978, 41 percent fit the definition of "unchurched." This proportion grew slightly to 44 percent in 1988, where it remained in a subsequent survey taken 10 years later, in 1998. The most recent survey shows a slightly higher figure, 47 percent.

In each of the four studies of the unchurched, people in this category are found most likely to be male, between 18 and 29 years old, living in the western part of the country, single, or married to a spouse with a different religious background.

Many of those who leave—and return—to church do so not for theological reasons, but practical ones: they move to a new community; change work schedules; experience health problems; or get involved in other activities.

Six in 10 of those who indicate they had at one time been active in their churches say they could see a situation that would bring them back to church. Such situations include: a change in family situation; finding a clergy person with whom they can openly discuss their religious doubts and spiritual needs; finding a church with good youth programs; and finding a church that can provide a supportive and life-changing experience.

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ShelfTalk

ESSENTIAL BOOKS FOR PREACHING

Preaching is the primary ministry function of most pastors. Excellence in preaching requires, among other things, a commitment to growth and learning. That includes reading great books on preaching. Consider adding the following books to your library:

1. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* by Haddon W. Robinson (Baker, 256 pp., hardcover).

Why buy? This contemporary classic, recently updated, is a great resource, even if you don't always preach expository sermons.

2. *Communicate with Power: Insights from America's Top Communicators*, edited by Michael Duduit (Baker, 240 pp., paperback).



Why buy? Discover how the best preachers prepare and preach.

They make it look easy, but they really work at it.

3. *Preaching That Connects* by Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson (Zondervan, 160 pp., paperback).

Why buy? This easy-to-read, practical book is especially good on illustrations and burnishing a sermon to make it better.

4. *Preaching To a Postmodern World: A Guide To Reaching Twenty-first Century*

Listeners by Graham Johnston and Haddon W. Robinson (Baker, 189 pp., paperback).

Why buy? This book helps pastors understand the changing culture and how they can communicate effectively with it.

—Stephen Lim

CyberBuzz

FINDING THE SITES THAT ARE MOST HELPFUL

With millions of Web sites available, how can a minister find those that are most helpful. First, use a good search engine and search with specific words pertaining to the material for which you are looking. Second, ask other ministers for addresses to Web sites

www.northernlight.com

Over 7,000 authoritative sources from newswires, newspapers, broadcast news transcripts, business and trade magazines, academic and scientific journals, analyst reports, and more.

www.gospelcom.net/rzim/

Ravi Zacharias specializes on addressing

consortium designed to train young leaders, exchange resources, share ideas, spark creativity in ministry, and develop online connectedness among Christian communities that are sensitive to the postmodern context.

www.leonardsweet.com/

Leonard Sweet has produced more research on postmodernism and its relationship to ministry than perhaps anyone else. Some good free stuff on the site, but the rest will cost you.

www.preachingplus.com

A site devoted to worship service resources. For \$9.95 per month you get access to everything they have. Resources range from sermons, to film clip ideas, to statistics and illustrations.

www.zondervanchurch-source.com/CLIP/postmodern.htm

Loads of links on postmodernism and Gen X from Zondervan.

www.smsu-xa.org/

The Chi Alpha ministry at Southwest Missouri State University is effectively reaching and discipling postmoderns. Their resource page will take you to www.reachtheu.com, the Web site of the national Chi Alpha ministry. This is the class of the league for campus ministry, and probably for lots of other ministries too. Check out the links for Multimedia.

—Gary Allen

postmodernity from the perspective of apologetics. Check out the links to find other Web-based resources of this type.

www.newWay.org/

A site that features material on how to communicate the gospel creatively. Includes the arts, the net, research methodology, and just about anything else. Heavy missions emphasis.

www.freshresource.com/

An eclectic, international

they use.

The key is networking with others whom you know and trust to find the best helps available.

Good research helps are:

www.searchenginewatch.com/links/major.html

Looking for a particular search engine? What you need is a search engine of search engines. This site lists search engines that cover all types of topics.

www.copernic.com

Search the Web quickly by querying all of the leading search engines at once.

History at a Glance

continued from pg. 4

expand the Reformation. Throughout his life, Martin Luther promoted the idea that man is justified by faith alone.

75 YEARS AGO—1927

- A formal constitution and bylaws was adopted by the growing Fellowship of the Assemblies of God at the 12th General Council held in September. Efforts at that time failed to change the denomination name to Pentecostal Evangelical Church.

50 YEARS AGO—1952

- Albert Schweitzer, the theologian and musician who gave up a career as organist and Bach expert to establish a hospital in French Equatorial Africa, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10. He was honored for setting a living example of reverence for life, his universal concept of ethics.

25 YEARS AGO—1977

- John Nepomucene Neumann (1811–60) was canonized as the first American male saint by the Roman Catholic Church. He was named after a 14th-century martyr, John Nepomucene.

—Glenn Gohr



Your Health

The Gift of 'Green Plants'

For a Christian, all instruction is revealed through Scripture. So it is with the nourishment of the human body. One of the earliest nutritional instructions was given to Noah: "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Genesis 9:3, NIV).

God's words in this early revelation are amazing. The study of nutrition continues to uncover the abundance of this passage.

Recent science has uncovered hundreds of phytochemicals (plant chemicals) and antioxidants that increase wellness and protect against disease. Beta-carotene, found in green and orange vegetables, will (when consumed from food) decrease the risk of certain cancers. Isoflavones, found in soy products, protect against the progression of heart disease, bone loss that occurs in older adults, and hormone-related cancers. Allium, phytochemical found in garlic and onions, interferes with the conversion of nitrates to carcinogens and lowers cholesterol.

Antioxidants, such as vitamin E, vitamin C, and selenium, protect the body from free radicals that enter the body through the lungs as pollution and cigarette smoke, through the gut as food additives, or as by-products of chemical reactions that occur naturally in the body. Antioxidants neutralize these free radicals before they can cause cell damage, leading to cardiac disease and tumors.

Everyone can take advantage of God's early promise by making a commitment to a few simple meal changes. At your next meal, shift from an animal-centered diet to a plant-centered diet by cutting your meat portion in half. Next, fill the extra space on your plate with pasta, rice, or beans. Pile on steamed carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, and green, yellow, orange, and red peppers. Add extra flavor with marinara sauce, lemon juice, flavored vinegars, or low-fat cheese such as Parmesan. Add a whole-wheat dinner roll and a glass of low-fat milk. Enjoy.

—Donna Skelley, R.D.



Inside Track

SUNDAY SCHOOL INSIGHTS

While most Americans continue to consider themselves to be Christian, levels of participation and growth in the Christian faith have remained frozen in time. Survey data reveals some key insights about Sunday school.

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ACROSS THE PAST DECADE:

- 2000–19%; 1999–19%; 1998–23%; 1997–23%; 1996–27%; 1995–17%; 1994–21%; 1993–22%;

1992–22%; 1991–23%

- 22 percent of women compared to 14 percent of men attend Sunday school in a typical week. (2000)
- 33 percent of born-again Christians and 60 percent of evangelicals attend Sunday school in a typical week. (2000)
- Married individuals are more likely than are single adults to attend a Sunday school class in a typical week (22 percent to 15 percent respectively). (2000)
- Sunday school remains a draw primarily in the South, where nearly three out of ten adults attend in a typical week. (2000)

- Contrary to popular opinion, there is virtually no drop-off in Sunday school attendance during the summer months. (1999)
- One out of ten adults is currently involved in teaching a Sunday school class, a catechism class, or another type of Christian education class at their religious center. This has remained relatively constant over the past decade. (1995)
- Adult Sunday school classes ranked in the middle ground of those things that influenced peoples' decisions of whether or not to return to a church they

had visited. Only 26 percent ranked it as extremely important, while 23 percent listed it as pretty important and 30 percent listed it as somewhat important. It ranked 9th out of the list of 22 factors. (1999)

- Of the 16 percent of churched adults involved in discipleship, 69 percent rely on small groups for their growth. (2000)
- Of the 16 percent of churched adults involved in discipleship, one-fifth (20 percent) rely on Sunday schools.

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Boomers to Zoomers

All generations may be created equal, but they certainly do not view religion or the Christian church equally. The chart below indicates that, while 77 percent of those 75 and older feel that religion is very important in their lives, only 45 percent of those age 18 to 29 feel the same way.

This differential is not just a matter of attitudes. It is also reflected in church-attendance statistics. Congregational development leader Kevin Martin points out that, "The GI or Builders Generation is 9.7 percent of the U.S. population; 60 percent of them are members of a church. Boomers are 29 percent of the population; around 40 percent are affiliated with a church. Survivors (or Gen X) comprise 27.5 percent of the U.S. population; only 18 percent are affiliated with a church. Millennials (born 1982 and after) are 21.4 percent of the population, but less than 10 percent are affiliated with a church."

My own observations and those of other

researchers confirm the obvious: in many congregations, the under-35 demographic is simply missing. Jimmy Long contends that any congregation with less than 30 percent of its Sunday morning attendance in this category is on the road to extinction. Younger Christians are unavailable to expand the church's ministry or even to replace older believers who are aging out. No youth, no future.

Some churches are responding to this crisis by ignoring it. Denial is a deadly enemy. Others are reacting by condemning the young and decrying postmodernism as a mortal enemy. Fortunately, a third type of church also exists. Instead of treating the young adult as some sort of spiritual traitor, this congregation seeks creative ways to incarnate the gospel for them in understandable ways.

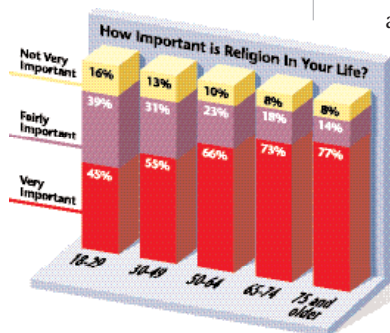
Ask yourself:

1. What percentage of our Sunday morning attendance is adults age 18 to 35?
2. What forms of ministry does our church make

available to this demographic?

Then ask your church: "What price would you pay to see your children and grandchildren come into the kingdom of God?"

—Earl Creps



Source: "The Age Factor in Religious Attitudes and Behavior," The Gallup Organization, July 14, 1999. Adapted from OnMission.

U.S. Religion Watch

AFTER BLIP, LEVEL OF FAITH RETURNS TO NORMAL



Americans experienced a surge of faith last fall after the terrorist attacks, but various polls indicate that spiritual commitment had returned to pre-September 11 levels by early this year.

Immediately following the disaster, it appeared as though the nation could be on the cusp of a religious revival. The president called for a national day of prayer. Millions of workers attended church services on lunch hours. Spontaneous community prayer groups gathered. Television networks flashed announcements that their prayers were with those who had lost families in the attacks. Secular radio station announcers urged listeners to pray. Business marquee proclaimed "God Bless America." Indeed, church attendance swelled briefly.

Yet, the revival was short-lived. By the beginning of 2002:

A survey by Harvard political professor Robert Putnam found that

Americans had not changed their church attendance habits as a result of September 11, remaining at 42 percent.

Robert Wuthnow, director of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, reported that the basic religious makeup of Americans—one-fourth devout, one-fourth secular, and half mildly interested—had not changed.

Frank Newport, editor in chief of the Gallup Poll, said there is little evidence that large numbers of Americans are disrupting their daily lives as far as religious practices are concerned.

George Barna, president of Barna Research Group, discovered no change in the percentage of Americans who pray, read the Bible, participate in a small group, or volunteer at church. The number of Christians saying they are "absolutely committed" to Christianity remained virtually identical at 44 percent.

—John Kennedy

CrossRoads

UFF DA: A DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

Growing up in North Dakota and marrying a Norwegian has given me an opportunity to observe the usage of a very fascinating word: *Uff Da*. It defies definition. Just when you think you have identified some grammatical rules for its usage, you hear another context in which it is used.

Spirituality is becoming increasingly like *Uff Da*—a catchall phrase that catches nothing at all.

If we were to randomly ask Americans, “Are you religious?” very few would raise their hands. In fact, the response is increasingly, “I’m not religious, I’m spiritual.” That’s where the difficulty emerges. In 2002, what does the word *spiritual* mean in North American Christianity?

We live in a spiritual-quest culture and as such, faith as a settled doctrinal position is being replaced by faith as a journey that is an end in itself.

Unfortunately, churches sometimes create structures that appeal to this emerging cultural definition of spirituality. Churches become centers for the consuming of the latest religious experience—a veritable Super Wal-Mart religious marketplace. The new spiritual-quest query is “How can I feel good about myself?”

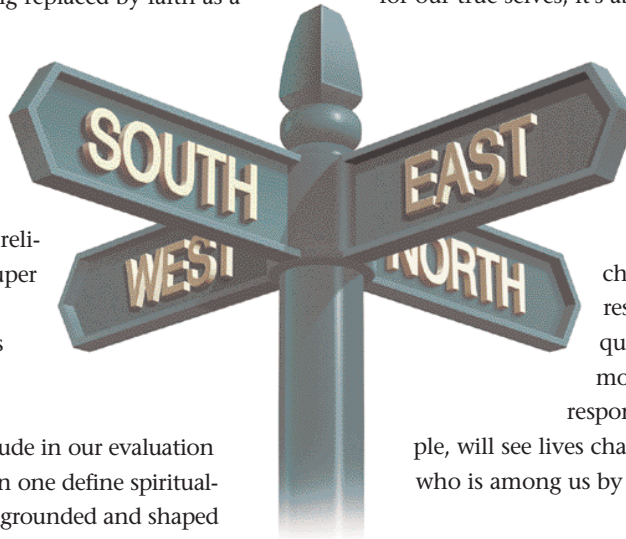
I have some questions to include in our evaluation of the current state of affairs. Can one define spirituality or be spiritual without being grounded and shaped

by biblically rooted creed and theological reflection? Can one be spiritual apart from the Holy Spirit? Can a person know what spirituality really is outside of a deep and committed participation in a faith community?

Christianity in the non-Western world (now called the majority world) is reshaping the face of Christian spirituality. There is an assumption that a holy life, moral living, equitable relationships, and a life lived in reliance on the Holy Spirit for empowerment elicit from a deep encounter with the God who is authoritatively described in the Bible. The proof of Christian spirituality is in the living, and the living is linked to God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. In other words, Christian spirituality is not about our search for our true selves; it’s about God’s divine search and rescue of lost humanity and our obedient and joyful responses to such grace.

The spiritual-quest culture that is part of the contemporary North American reality is a huge opportunity for the church. Christians who listen and respond with clear answers to questions and display concrete models of vibrant spirituality that respond to the genuine search of people, will see lives changed by the power of Christ who is among us by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

—Byron Klaus



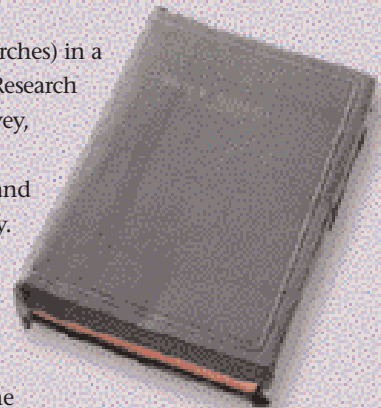
Faith Communities Today

SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

In 2000, the Assemblies of God participated with 44 other faith groups (14,301 churches) in a Faith Communities Today Survey conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary. Out of 958 Assemblies of God churches that received the survey, 619 churches responded. Following is a summary from one segment of this survey.

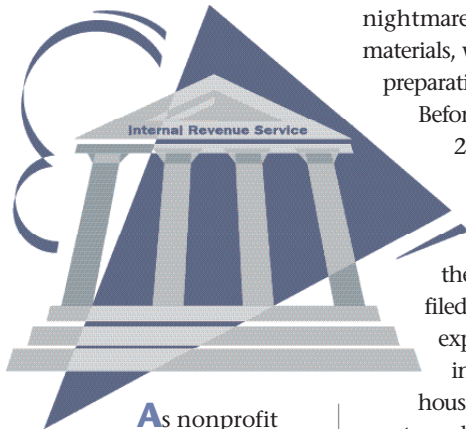
Summary: Ninety percent or more of A/G churches indicated that Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit are absolutely foundational sources of authority. Three-fourths of respondents chose Scripture as the single most important source. This survey also found that: Baptist and Muslims are particularly oriented toward Scripture while orthodox Christians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Mormons are particularly oriented toward creeds, doctrine, and/or tradition.

The complete survey can be accessed at: www.fact.hartsem.edu/, or examine the Assemblies of God portion of the survey at: www.fact.hartsem.edu/denom/Assemblies-FactFreq.pdf.



Dollars & Sense

TAXING TACTICS



As nonprofit organizations, churches are not required to file a Form 990. But, notes Carla Dupree, CPA, "Any organization that pays salary, housing allowances, or any other payments to individuals or other business entities must file the appropriate reports, including W-2s, 1099s, and state withholding tax forms." Instead of waiting until the new year to begin preparation process, here are ways to get a year-end jump on tax season.

FOCUS

Your church's forms will not get filed if no one focuses on them. Encourage your finance committee or bookkeeper to begin focusing on the year ahead. Help them make the returns a mental priority. Set a realistic deadline for completing the initial review of the church's financial papers.

ORGANIZE

Messy paperwork—especially the lack of needed receipts and tax forms—can make tax season a

nightmare. Well-organized materials, will make tax preparation a dream.

Before working on 2002 returns, gather and organize tax-related materials. Ensure they are properly filed by subject or expense, i.e., income/wages, housing allotments, mortgage lender, donations, equipment leasing agreements, etc. If any information is missing, contact the related entity and request copies. The sooner the request, the greater the likelihood your church will have all necessary copies once returns are being completed.

GIVE

Provide W-2s or other documentation to church staff members as soon as possible to ensure timely filing of individual tax returns.

ASK

If your staff struggles each year with tax preparation, seek assistance from church members who are CPAs, accountants, or tax professionals. Using their services can reduce your stress, as well as any liability for late or incorrect tax preparation.

EXTEND

If you know your staff may miss the April 15, 2003 deadline, request a 3-month extension from the IRS or your state. There is no limit to how many extensions you can request.

—Lisa Crayton

Renew Your Mind

IN GOD WE TRUST?

We casually drop coins into our piggy banks while making weak jokes about chicken feed, and hardly noticing the timeworn phrase stamped on each of them—In God We Trust. A Pennsylvania pastor during the Civil War did not take such an indifferent approach to his nation's currency.

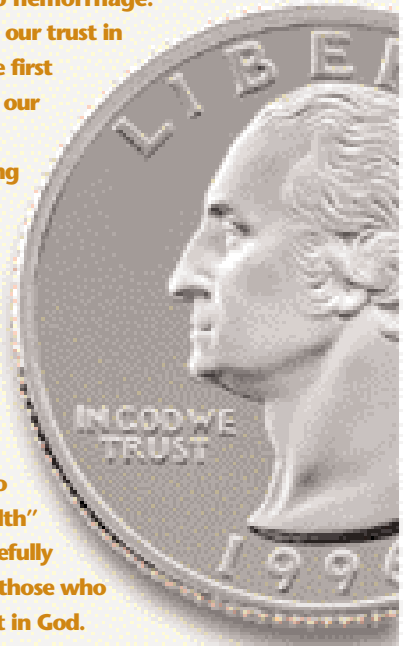
Concerned that the nation had neglected recognizing the Almighty God on its coinage, Pastor N.R. Watkinson wrote to Samuel P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, suggesting that God be recognized in some form on our coins. Chase, in turn, wrote to the director of the Philadelphia Mint directing that "the trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins." The rest is history. The first coin to bear the inscription was minted in 1864. Since 1955, the phrase has been on every United States coin.

Trust in God, however, needs to be more than an inscription on the jingling coins in our pocket. "Trust permits life to flow among people in relationship," states Walter Wangerin, Jr. "Trust is as precious as the arteries of a physical body; they carry the blood. The rupture of such trust then, causes life itself to hemorrhage."*

As a nation, has our trust in God ruptured since first being inscribed on our coins? Could this explain our bleeding society? Have we become like those the Psalmist talks about in Psalm 20:7 who "trust in chariots and in horses" rather than the living God? Or those who trust in their "wealth" (Psalm 49:6)? Hopefully we are listed with those who fully put their trust in God.

—Peggy Musgrove

* Walter Wangerin, Jr., *Mourning into Dancing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 93.



TimeWise

Time, not money, is our most precious possession. Since the invention of devices to keep time, time has continued to elude us.

Time can be our greatest enemy in ministry. Where do we find time to be quiet before the Lord in an already filled schedule? How do we make time for family? And the piles of paper on our desks keep getting higher.

Even the most organized people can find ways to better conserve time. Since a large percentage of our time is spent at the office, let's think about ways to be more time-wise there.

- **Don't visit too much.**

At the risk of appearing unfriendly, 20 minutes is a lot of time to spend each morning chitchatting at the coffee maker. Sometimes a pleasant "good morning" is sufficient.

- **Do the hardest tasks first.** Tackle the job that's most time-consuming and requires most thought first thing in the morning. Not only will you be working when your body is rested, but you will also feel a sense of accomplishment.

- **Don't procrastinate.** Take Henry Ford's advice not to touch a piece of paper twice. If at all possible, make a decision on what action to take the day it arrives on your desk.

- **Organize your desk.**



It's an energy drain to work in the middle of a trashy desk. No energy—no accomplishment. Go through your stacks of paper and organize them, placing correspondence in folders marked 1, 2, and 3, according to priority. You'll be amazed at how quickly you can breeze through those folders.

- **Stay focused.** If you've planned to return phone calls at 9 a.m., don't get sidetracked by the computer reminding you that you just received another E-mail. Return those phone calls before you do anything else. Close your door as a reminder to yourself and your staff that you're on a mission and do not want to be disturbed or distracted except for a true emergency.

By following this simple approach to office work, you'll save minutes (sometimes hours) each day, feel less stressed, and have more time left for more important and enjoyable activities.

—Faith Hamilton

LeaderLife

AT-RISK LEADERS

Leadership is a dangerous business. Studies show that a significant percentage of Christian leaders are either at risk for an integrity failure or are already involved in one. In the main, these crises are sexual, financial, or behavioral. Every one of us has friends who were once in the ministry, but are working secular jobs today. Along the way they met with disaster of some sort. These casualties do not count the walking wounded who limp through their pain until retirement. In fact, if current trends continue, most of the people in the pastorate today will not be in full-time ministry at retirement age.

How do the shining intentions of the early days become ashes at mid-life? Often it starts with definitions of leadership that are derived from culture rather than Scripture. If you are thinking the thoughts below, you may be at risk:

1. *The ministry can't get along without me.* Someone has said that the first symptom of insanity is the feeling that I am indispensable. If you hear those words coming out of your mouth, there is a good chance you are on the way to burnout and collapse. You need to back off.

2. *My spouse will just have to understand.* The stressed leader tends to turn the family into a support system for the ministry to provide food, shelter, clean laundry, and

encouragement so the struggle can continue. At-risk leaders maximize their own importance and minimize the needs of those closest to them. This plants the seeds of bitterness in marriage and rebellion in the hearts of children. Family has to come first.

3. *One time won't hurt.* Most leaders who fall into sin, especially sexual sin, are using lust as a form of self-medication for stress. Generally the early involvement seems relatively innocent, implying that it can be contained safely. This is a lie. It can never be contained. Leaders must have zero tolerance on integrity issues.

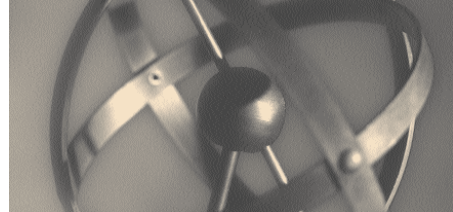
4. *There is no one I can really talk to.* Sin and isolation are business partners. The former breeds in the climate established by the latter, and the latter ensures that the former is never dealt with until it's too late. No leader is immune from temptation and trial, so every leader needs to be part of an accountability relationship in which he or she can be asked the hard questions and encouraged. Only this kind of openness puts teeth into our commitment to personal purity.

If thoughts like these are dominating your mind, it's only a question of time until something gives. Put the brakes on now by divesting commitments, meeting your family again, and finding accountability.

—Earl Creps

interview

W I T H T H O M A S E . T R A S K



ASK THE SUPERINTENDENT— Sold on Sunday School

Our best days as a church for growth, for producing ministers, and for utilizing laypeople took place when churches made Sunday school a priority.



Ask Thomas Trask how he feels about Sunday school and you will hear him reminisce about loving, committed teachers who took an interest in him as a rebellious preacher's kid and, who over time, nurtured and supported his call to ministry.

His spirited enthusiasm toward the ministry of Sunday school has not wavered since those formative years. In this Enrichment interview, Trask pauses to reflect on his early years in Sunday school and then speaks to several key issues with respect to this vital ministry of the church.

WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY OF SUNDAY SCHOOL?

TRASK: I was raised in a pastor's home, so Sunday school has always had an important role in my life. I remember going to Sunday school and having teachers who were committed to teaching and loving us, even when we weren't lovable. Even if a student was undisciplined, these teachers' commitment to Sunday school and their love for their pupils were evident.

HOW DID YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS INFLUENCE YOU?

TRASK: I had several teachers during those formative years—when I was a rebellious preacher's kid—who took an interest in me and loved me. When I would kneel at the altar on Sunday nights, a Sunday school teacher would come and kneel beside me, put his or her arm around me, and say, "You're going to make it. I'm praying for you." And we'd pray together. A person never forgets those experiences. Teaching was more than line upon line and precept upon precept. These teachers demonstrated their concern for their students in and out of the classroom.

WHAT ROLE DID SUNDAY SCHOOL PLAY IN YOUR CALL TO THE MINISTRY?

TRASK: My call to ministry came in a youth camp, but it was reinforced, encouraged, and nurtured in Sunday school. I cannot remember a time when a Sunday school teacher did not support my call to ministry.

Many times God gives teachers insight into what the Spirit is doing in the hearts and lives of their students. An alert Sunday school teacher will realize this and speak to the student concerning God's plan for his or her life. A student might be questioning God's call. But when a teacher says, "I see God doing something in you; I see God's hand on you; I see God's call on your life," God can use that teacher to confirm God's call in a student's life.

HOW CAN SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS WORK WITH PARENTS IN NURTURING AND STRENGTHENING STUDENTS?

TRASK: Sometimes parents tell a child something and the child thinks, *That's what they want me to be.* And the child resists his or her parents' advice. But the Sunday school teacher has an unbiased perspective. The Sunday school teacher has one agenda—to help the student come to know the Lord so the student can be used for the kingdom of God.

WHAT TRENDS IN SUNDAY SCHOOL TODAY CONCERN YOU?

TRASK: Our best days as a church for growth, for producing ministers, and for utilizing laypeople took place when churches made Sunday school a priority. For whatever reason, we have moved away from that and the church has suffered.

Many pastors think you can only have Sunday school from 9 until 10:30 a.m. on Sunday morning. That puts Sunday school in a narrow perspective. Many of our churches are utilizing other settings for Sunday school. They have made a deliberate decision to disciple their church members.

I am encouraged that we have turned a corner. There was a time we thought the church could make it without discipling men and women. Praise and worship seemed to be the major focus. But the back door was left open. Unless pastors disciple people, the church has a revolving door. People can be saved at the altar, but they need to be disciplined after they are saved.

The pastor must be deliberate in

Sunday school and discipling. You cannot do that from the pulpit on Sunday morning, Sunday night, or Wednesday night. There has to be a small-group setting where learning and nurturing take place, and where the disciplines of Christian living are spelled out and defined so people know what's expected of them as Christians. Sunday school provides that setting.

Many pastors are recognizing the need for discipleship through the Sunday school. Some have Wednesday night school of the Bible or have discipleship training through home cell groups. The title and time slot aren't important—it's what happens in each setting that is critical.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PASTOR'S INVOLVEMENT IN SUNDAY SCHOOL?

TRASK: The pastor has to be sold on Sunday school. If the pastor isn't, Sunday school is not going to have the emphasis

biblical requirements for servanthood is faithfulness. We emphasized the need to be faithful and dependable. But we also emphasized the joy and the reward in influencing the lives of boys and girls, young people, and adults.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PENTECOSTAL CURRICULUM? WHERE CAN PASTORS GET GOOD CURRICULUM FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL?

TRASK: Your Sunday school will be no better than your curriculum. A Pentecostal church will not get Pentecostal curriculum from a non-Pentecostal publishing house. There are those who say, "You're a promoter of Radiant Life literature and you're a promoter of Gospel Publishing House." Yes, I make no apologies. Our curriculum is written by Spirit-filled people. A Pentecostal church needs to be using Pentecostal curriculum. I've looked at other curriculum. There is nothing better than what Radiant Life publishes here at

The Sunday school teacher has one agenda—to help the student come to know the Lord so the student can be used for the kingdom of God.

or the impact. It won't receive the promotion it needs. The congregation will adopt the pastor's attitude and Sunday school won't be important to them either.


As you look back to some of the great, historic churches in the current Pentecostal movement, you will find the pastors of those churches were strong Sunday school promoters. Consequently, they built strong churches. These two things are tied together.

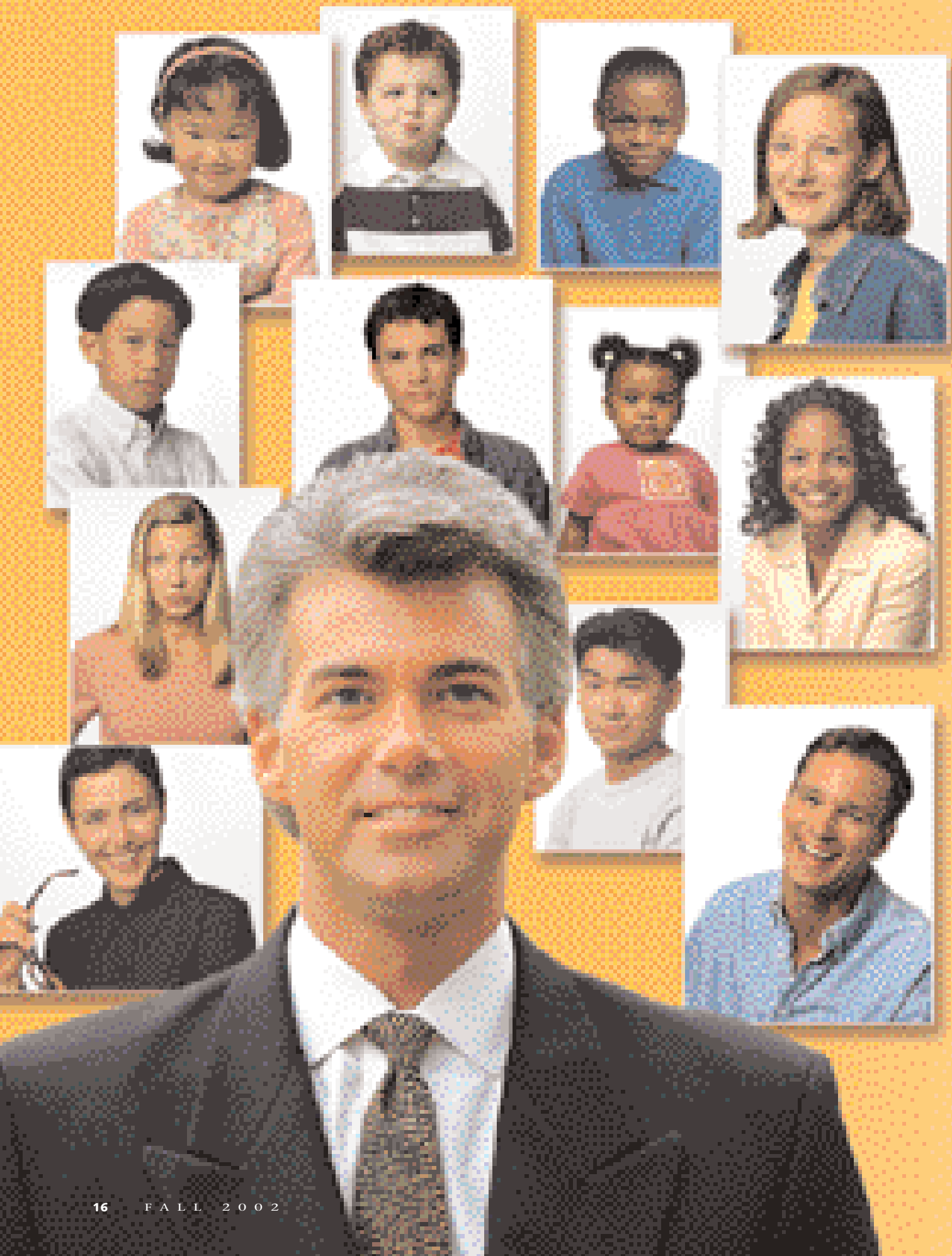
HOW DID YOU PROMOTE SUNDAY SCHOOL WHEN YOU PASTORED?

TRASK: I regularly kept Sunday school needs before the church. I had an annual workers recruitment Sunday where we highlighted Sunday school. I would preach and call for those who wanted to become involved in the Christian education ministry of the church. We told them what was involved, the commitment and training that was required. One of the

Gospel Publishing House. We have other Pentecostal fellowships that use our curriculum and tell us there is nothing better.

DO YOU HAVE A FINAL CHALLENGE TO PASTORS CONCERNING SUNDAY SCHOOL AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

TRASK: Yes. Do not grow weary in well doing. We don't see the fruit immediately after planting. It may take years before a tree produces fruit. But that's what Sunday school does. Sunday school puts seed in the soil. Then you cultivate and water it. You pray over it. You care for the seed. Then you will have the joy of seeing the fruit of that life blossoming into an instrument God can use for His kingdom. So the challenge as a pastor is to keep the focus, keep the mission, staying white hot in your heart about the call of God to Christian education and Sunday school. And it will produce a glorious church, no question about it. 



This church should not be growing. Located in the Florida panhandle, the nondenominational fellowship did not have demographics in its favor. While many people think of Florida as highly populated and fast growing, many areas of the state are still sparsely populated. Such was the location of the church my consulting team and I visited.

enhanced the church's growth, he spoke of only one: Sunday school. Many churches have Sunday schools. What was so different about his church's Sunday school?

The interview quickly led us to an issue that my research team and I see repeated in churches around the United States. While specific factors related to

B Y T H O M S . R A I N E R

THE PASTOR: *Key to a Vibrant, Growing*

While specific factors related to organization and emphases are important, the differentiating factor between healthy Sunday schools and unhealthy Sunday schools is often the active and visible support of the pastor.

Within a 5-mile radius of the church, the 2000 census listed no more than 482 residents. A check of the 1990 census revealed that the same area has grown a grand total of three people in a decade.

In the past 3 years from the point we arrived, the average attendance grew from 97 to 352. By the year 2000, over 60 percent of the residents were attending this church on a given Sunday. My consulting team had to find the secrets of this remarkable growth.

The pastor was disarmingly modest and soft-spoken. He quickly gave credit to God and a move of His Spirit in the town and the church. But when we pressed him on any methodologies that

organization and emphases are important, the differentiating factor between healthy Sunday schools and unhealthy Sunday schools is often the active and visible support of the pastor. Indeed, my own story is one of failure in this key leadership issue.

CONFESSIONS OF A SUNDAY SCHOOL SKEPTIC

Before coming to Southern Seminary as dean in 1994, I served as pastor of four churches in four states. In the 1980s, I was a true Sunday school skeptic. Though I did not attempt to dismantle the Sunday schools in the churches I pastored, I was not a leader in making the organization stronger and more

Sunday School

evangelistic. If anything, the Sunday schools of my churches suffered from pastoral neglect.

I was not alone. Many of my peers were like me, enamored with some of the latest methodologies and innovations to help a church grow. Sunday school seemed a bit old-fashioned compared to the cutting-edge information we received from a plethora of sources. Indeed, I had my doubts that Sunday school would be a viable growth, teaching, and assimilation tool in the 21st century. But two developments led me

church? Several key responses are worth pursuing.

PASTORS OWN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Recently I was leading a conference of over 300 pastors in Orlando, Florida. In my presenting the research of the churches we studied, I mentioned our findings of the critical role of Sunday school in the health of a church. One of the pastors approached me during break. The tears in this man's eyes told me that my break was over. I listened to his story.

our nation and, with only a few exceptions, has mirrored the growth of the United States. The movement had its beginnings in England in the late 1700s, when Robert Raikes, editor of the *Gloucester Journal*, hired teachers for impoverished children.¹

Sunday school quickly moved to the United States and was aided by other forces pushing for social reform. Just before 1800, Sunday school had spread to Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and New Jersey.

In our study of over 4,000 churches across America, Sunday school was the third highest-rated, effective evangelistic methodology.

to see my biases in a different light.

First, I noticed that many of the highly touted growth innovations had an unusually short life span. What was hyped to be *the* methodology for the church disappeared in a year or so. In the meantime, Sunday school continued to be the dominant program in most churches.

Second, in 1994, I began the first of several research projects involving over 4,000 churches across America. In the healthy and growing churches, my research team and I heard pastors talk about the role of Sunday school in the teaching, evangelistic, and assimilation ministries of their churches. Though many did share some new and innovative methodologies, almost all the pastors said that sustained growth would have been impossible without the Sunday school.

Indeed, Sunday school is neither neglected nor accidental in the healthy churches we researched. The pastor has made a conscious and intentional decision to utilize the Sunday school as a key arm in reaching, teaching, and retaining. What, then, must a pastor do today to be the visionary catalyst for the Sunday school organization and, thus, the

“Why,” he lamented, “has no one told me about the importance of Sunday school? None of my peers, no one at Bible college, not even my own denominational leaders have shown me the data I heard from you. If someone had told me, I know I would have led my church differently.”

In educational and denominational circles, the role of Sunday school is often shared with leaders in Christian education or laypersons with specific tasks in Sunday school. Rarely are pastors taught the importance of Sunday school in the health of their churches. Yet, the potential of Sunday school will rarely be realized without the ownership and enthusiastic support of the pastor. Our research team discovered that pastors would usually support Sunday school if they were given sufficient reasons and good data to do so.

Here is some of the key research that has convinced more than one skeptical pastor of the importance of Sunday school.

PASTORS EMBRACE SUNDAY SCHOOL AS AN EVANGELISTIC TOOL

Those who predict the demise of the Sunday school are betting against history. The Sunday school is almost as old as

After 1800, the purpose of Sunday school expanded to both biblical education and evangelism. The first national Sunday school effort began in 1824. The American Sunday school's stated purpose was to organize, civilize, and evangelize. The Union trained leadership, published literature, and formed thousands of evangelistic Sunday schools by 1880.

Though the Sunday school movement began by educating children in England, it eventually became the teaching, nurturing, *and* evangelizing arm of the church. Sunday school evangelistic outreach was especially effective. By 1900, about 80 percent of all new church members in America first came to the church through the Sunday school.

When I present this historical excursion to pastors today, I typically receive a polite but bored look. Their expressions tell the story: What does this information have to do with my church and me today? The question is valid, especially in an environment where most visitors to our churches come first to worship services.

The purpose of the historical journey is twofold. First, I want to remind pastors that Sunday school has been *the*

primary evangelistic arm of the church for over a century. Second, the principles of evangelistic growth are operative today.

When Sunday school was a major evangelistic arm of the church, three primary but basic principles were in effect. First, the pastor was the chief advocate of and cheerleader for the Sunday school organization. Second, Sunday school classes had some type of accountability for evangelism inherent within each unit. Third, classes were *intentional* about reaching out evangelistically. The word *intentional* seemed to play a major part in the evangelistic success of Sunday schools. The sidebar embedded in this article, “Praying for the Lost in Sunday School” is but one of many examples of a 21st-century success story of an effective evangelistic Sunday school.

Sunday school as an evangelistic arm of the church is not limited to a few churches. Indeed, in our study of over 4,000 churches across America, Sunday school was the third highest-rated,

Now, fast-forward your imaginary journey 5 years into the future. Where are the 200 regular attendees? Of the group that attended both Sunday school and worship, 83 are still active in the church. Of the 100 who attended worship services alone, only 16 are still attending the church. Simply stated, those who were active in Sunday school were five times more likely to remain assimilated in the church than those who were in worship services alone.³ As I consult with pastors and churches across America, I am inevitably asked what can be done to slow the rate of dropout in their churches. When I respond with the two words “Sunday school,” I often receive a stare of disbelief.

I understand the attitudes of these pastors. Most of their churches have Sunday school classes. And in many of these classes they remember the boring and unprepared teacher, the classroom furniture of the 60s, and the relatively few participants who attend because that is what they have always done.

churches was that of expectations. We interviewed a pastor in the Washington, D.C., area about Sunday school and expectations. His testimony is not atypical of comments we heard from other pastors.

“A few years ago,” he told us, “I was ambivalent about Sunday school. I didn’t plan to eliminate it from our church, but I certainly was not giving it a priority.” Then he began to read and hear about churches that were rediscovering the strengths of the Sunday school.

“I guess you might say I had a wake-up call,” he told us. “I realized that our church had been evangelistically apathetic, and that our back door was wide open. I began rethinking my lack of priority about Sunday school. Then things began to change as our church made some intentional efforts to revitalize this ministry.”

Among the intentional efforts, the most dramatic were related to raising the commitment level of those who led and worked in Sunday school. Look at some of their changes:

Those who were active in Sunday school were five times more likely to remain assimilated in the church than those who were in worship services alone.

effective evangelistic methodology.² Pastors must realize that the issue is not that Sunday school is not working; rather, many pastors are not working Sunday school to be evangelistically effective.

PASTORS EMBRACE SUNDAY SCHOOL AS AN ASSIMILATION TOOL

Imagine you are leading a church with an average worship attendance of 200. Further imagine that the church is divided into two distinct groups of 100 each. The difference between the two groups is straightforward. One group attends worship services only, while the other group is active in both worship services and Sunday school.

But in the churches we studied in our nation, many pastors took a second look at Sunday school. They realized the potential for assimilation through this organization. And they decided that, if Sunday school were to be done in their churches, it would be done well. To have a first-rate organization, the pastors quickly discerned that they and the church leaders could no longer be content with business as usual. Expectations would have to be raised.

THE PASTOR, ASSIMILATION, AND THE EXPECTATION ISSUE

Our studies found that the key Sunday school issue separating higher-assimilation churches from lower-assimilation

churches was that of expectations. We interviewed a pastor in the Washington, D.C., area about Sunday school and expectations. His testimony is not atypical of comments we heard from other pastors.

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Among the intentional efforts, the most dramatic were related to raising the commitment level of those who led and worked in Sunday school. Look at some of their changes:

- Teachers would covenant to prepare lessons each week and to attend a Wednesday night workers meeting where the lessons would be discussed.
- Each adult class would establish a goal to start one new class each year.
- Each class would form care groups of no more than five people per group. The leader of each care group would be the primary minister to the others in the group.
- Each class would have an outreach leader to make certain that all guests were contacted and to see that the members in the Sunday school class were developing relationships with unchurched persons.
- Teachers and other leaders would

THE UNCHURCHED IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

My research team and I completed a major research project in 2001, interviewing 353 formerly unchurched adults. (Read the review of my book, *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched*, on page 164.) A formerly unchurched person is a new Christian of less than a year, who has also become active in a church for the first time in his or her life. In other words, we asked those who had been out of church all of their lives, and yet were recently reached with the gospel of Christ, "What happened?"

One of the many surprises we received from this group was their attraction to Sunday school. Sixty-eight percent of the formerly unchurched were active in Sunday school, compared to only 58 percent of long-term churchgoers.

What attracted these new believers to Sunday school? The first factor was a desire to learn more about the Bible. The second response was the attraction to become involved in ministry through the Sunday school. The third factor was the fellowship they experienced with other Christians. Perhaps the conventional wisdom that the unchurched are not attracted to Sunday school is more myth than reality.

—Thom S. Rainer

covenant to arrive early for Sunday school each week.

- Under the pastor's leadership, the church began an annual covenant renewal service where Sunday school leaders formally made these and other commitments.

The church began seeing amazing results as expectations were raised. "Once we declared that Sunday school was important and that we had

expectations of the leaders, the changes were dramatic," the pastor said. Attendance not only increased among the regular attendees, nominally active members began to attend as well. Turnover among teachers dropped dramatically. Ministry through the Sunday school increased almost exponentially. And, for the first time in the pastor's tenure, people were won to Christ through the Sunday school organization.

Repeatedly in our research, we heard about the renewal of the Sunday school. And we heard about results similar as the Washington, D.C., church. But more than any other factor, we heard about positive change because the pastor led the church and the Sunday school organization to higher expectations.

Are most pastors today buying into the incredible potential of Sunday school? While our research team has seen some amazing turnaround stories, not all pastors are Sunday school converts.

THE PASTOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SUNDAY SCHOOL

Throughout this article, and indeed in our entire consulting ministry, we have held a central thesis: A healthy Sunday school and church are integrally related to the pastor's attitude and vision about Sunday school. It would appear that the Sunday school organization in many churches suffers from benign neglect. The reasons for this neglect are numerous, but the pastors' attitudes could be summarized into four categories.

Some pastors have the same attitude I once had, that Sunday school is a tool of antiquity, a dinosaur headed for extinction. They are convinced that, even though the data shows the contrary, the newer models of ministry are better. Thus, their time and energy are directed away from Sunday school to other more contemporary approaches.

A second group of pastors simply take Sunday school for granted. It may be the largest program organization in their churches, and it will always be there, they reason.

A third group told us they had given so much attention to the corporate worship services that the Sunday school was relegated to secondary importance. Undoubtedly, the renewed interest in worship the past two decades has been a blessing to churches and their growth potential. But when Sunday school is neglected as a consequence, the wide-open front door is often offset by a wide-open back door.



"Is there any way you can suck the 'love your neighbor' thing out of my head so I can pound the kids next door?"

A final group recognizes the importance of Sunday school, but these pastors recognize that the business-as-usual, dull-teaching, low-expectation classes will not be effective. They realize that high-expectation classes and a high-expectation organization are the solutions to the mediocrity of the past.

In our interview with the pastors of the higher-expectation churches, we asked them if moving their Sunday schools from low expectation to high expectation caused any problems. Their answers were an unequivocal yes. Some teachers and leaders refused to agree to stricter requirements and dropped out of ministry and service. Others resisted, implying that high expectations in Sunday school hinted of legalism.

Never did we hear that the expectation issue was addressed with ease. But in virtually every case, the pastor told us that the pain was worth the gains realized. A pastor in South Carolina commented, "Our desire to have greater commitments came at a cost. We lost some members and made others mad."

"But was the move ultimately beneficial?" we asked.

"Without a doubt," he replied. "The people in our church realize more than ever that Sunday school is our primary teaching and assimilating arm of the church. And I predict it will soon be our chief evangelism arm."

WHERE DOES THE PASTOR BEGIN?

"Dr. Rainer," the seasoned pastor from Oregon began, "where do I start? I have served three different churches the past 27 years, and I have given very little attention to the Sunday school. How would you advise me to change directions?"

His question is typical of the hundreds of pastors who write or call us. We typically lead the inquiring pastor through the following steps:

1. Affirm the reality that many churches use healthy Sunday schools in their efforts to lead churches. A pastor cannot go further until he or she

is convinced of the importance of Sunday school.

2. Communicate your own support of Sunday school through preaching, writing newsletters, recognition of lay workers, and casual conversation.

3. Realize that business-as-usual Sunday school is ineffective. The high-expectation Sunday school is the remedy for mediocrity.

4. Mentor lay leaders who will become key leaders in and advocates of Sunday school.

5. Organize Sunday school so it becomes not only a key teaching arm of the church, but an organization mobilized for evangelism and ministry as well.

6. Slowly transition the Sunday school organization from low expectation to high expectation. This process may utilize covenant agreements, and it may take 3 or 4 years to complete the transition.

7. Deal with opposition lovingly, but with resolve. The transition to become a high-expectation Sunday school will not please everyone, but the conflict is most often worth the results.

If people had told me in the 1980s that I would be one of the most ardent supporters of Sunday school in the 21st century, I would have questioned their or my sanity. But the data is in, and it is difficult to dispute the facts. Sunday school is alive and well in healthy churches across America. And, in each

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of the churches, the key proponent and cheerleader is the pastor.

Sunday school has an amazing history. It struggled for recognition in the last two decades of the 20th century. But in a new century and a new millennium, many pastors are once again affirming the importance of Sunday school in their own churches. If such a trend continues, we may very well see the greatest era of Sunday school in days yet to come. **e**

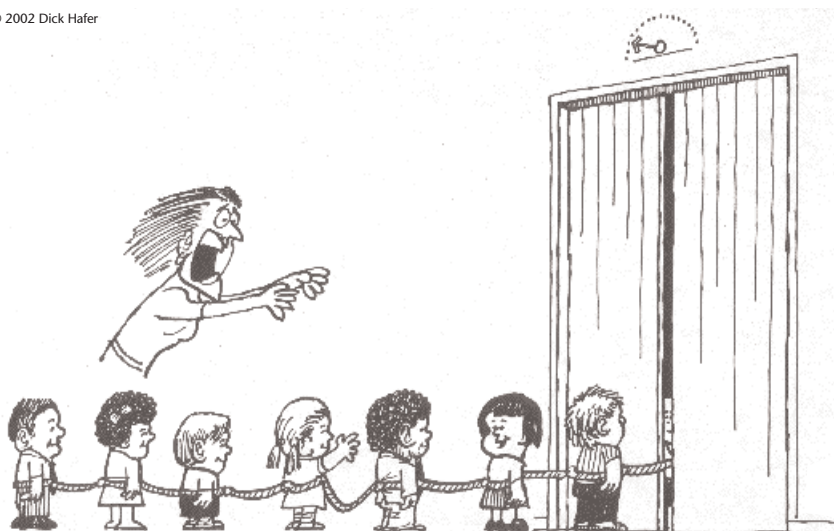
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E N D N O T E S

1. See Thom S. Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), chapter 5, "The Sunday School Factor," for an overview of the history of Sunday school in America.
2. Ibid., 17.
3. See Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), chapter 2, for a full discussion of Sunday school and assimilation.



When Donna realized it isn't always a good idea to tie your primary Sunday school students together while on a field trip.

interview

WITH SCOTT DAVIS, DANIEL
DELEON, AND RANDAL ROSS

Sunday School Today



SCOTT DAVIS



DANIEL DELEON



RANDAL ROSS

Churches that are growing numerically and spiritually have one thing in common—effective programs for discipling new converts and church members for ministry. The most effective program to accomplish this is Sunday school. And the key to this effective discipleship program is the pastor.

Enrichment's associate editor, Richard Schoonover, interviewed three Assemblies of God pastors who have a passion for Sunday school. Scott Davis has pastored Living Waters Assembly of God in Thermopolis, Wyoming, for 7 1/2 years. His congregation numbers between 75 and 100. Daniel DeLeon pastors Templo Calvario, a bilingual Hispanic church in Santa Ana, California, numbering 4,000 in Sunday morning attendance. Randal Ross pastors Calvary Church in Naperville, Illinois, with average Sunday morning attendance of 3,500.

Not only do these pastors share their passion for Sunday school, they also share what it takes to make Sunday school—and any discipleship program in the church—effective.

WHY IS SUNDAY SCHOOL AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR CHURCH'S MINISTRY?

DELEON: We strongly believe that our mandate from the Lord is to make disciples, not just converts. Sunday school has played a great part in our program to disciple people to become true followers of Christ. It is the best time and day in the week to train our people.

ROSS: We are committed to disciple people. The Great Commission not only

commanded us to win people, but to train and grow them to Christian maturity. We make discipleship a requirement for fulfilling the will of God. We present it in a way that says growing in Christ is not optional; it is something that goes along with being saved, Spirit-filled, and growing in the Word. From the pulpit I frequently talk about the joy of growing as a disciple of Christ.

DAVIS: Sunday school is the best way to disciple our congregation because it is designed for Bible study in different age groups. It also allows for interaction between students and teachers. More and more people want to study certain topics. It's hard to do that through a sermon. But in Sunday school, topics relating to different age groups can be studied and discussed.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SENIOR PASTOR IN SUNDAY SCHOOL?

ROSS: You reproduce what you are and what you prioritize. If you want it, you have to preach on it. We talk about Christian maturity as a joy in the life of a believer. You need to promote, but you also need to be an example. I teach and attend classes. I also oversee the major vision and promotions of Sunday school to make sure people are becoming disciples of Christ.

DAVIS: The senior pastor has to be pushing it. Since I pastor a smaller

church, I teach a class. I also oversee the Sunday school ministry and help train our teachers.

DELEON: I must be the leader. We don't have the traditional Sunday school superintendent because our program is more extensive than just Sunday school. I need to give leadership to the ministry and spearhead it by encouraging people to be here, by provoking a thirst for knowledge of the Word, and to enter into a true discipleship program. The senior pastor is the key to a successful Sunday school program.

classes from 7 to 8 p.m. We call it Wednesday Family Education night. We changed to Wednesday night because Sunday school was dying on the vine. Sunday school is too important in reaching and discipling people to drop it.

I began to pray about what God wanted us to do. At district council 4 years ago a speaker taught the We Build People philosophy. He said that we don't have to do things the way we have always done them. I listed reasons we were failing in Sunday school, and I felt God

decreased. It would have been easier to keep it on Sunday mornings, but it would have died.

I shared my vision for Sunday school with the board. We prayed about it for 6 months and the next fall we made the change. With the exception of a couple months, we have not been short any teachers. Attendance has remained high, and we are effectively discipling people.

ROSS: When we came to Calvary Church, Sunday school was declining. We made a radical leap by going

Sunday school is the best way to disciple our congregation because it is designed for Bible study in different age groups.—Davis



HOW HAS SUNDAY SCHOOL BEEN AN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLING PROGRAM IN YOUR CHURCH?

DAVIS: Sunday school is where our people get the majority of their knowledge of God and His Word. If it's left up to my preaching on Sunday morning, people will not be disciplined well. In the Sunday school class people can ask questions. They can have input. In a sermon, if they have a question, they must wait until later to ask it. Sunday school is effective because people can interact with each other.

In our model, we have Sunday school on Wednesday night. We use Radiant Life curriculum and have

speaking to me about moving Sunday school to Wednesday night. This was a tough decision because I had been raised to believe Sunday school was to be held on Sunday morning. As I began to look at it, there were pros to Wednesday nights. We had more people available to be teachers. We had kids and parents coming together.

When we moved Sunday school to Wednesday night, our Sunday school attendance more than doubled and our normal Wednesday night attendance tripled. The problems we were having trying to develop an effective Sunday morning Sunday school

to what we call Believers Life Institute. It has more of a college feel to it with electives and various levels: 100, 200, 300, and 400. It is also based on lifestyle and need. Some classes focus on felt needs like raising teenagers. Others are biblical literacy issues like college-level New Testament survey, Greek, etc. To accommodate our attendance, we use Sunday mornings and Wednesday and Thursday nights.

When we went from the teacher lecturing to interaction and graduated classes with specific goals, our Christian education program exploded. Believers Life has been one

of our foundational principles. It increased our Sunday school attendance 2 1/2 times in 1 year. There are now about 1,700 adults involved in Believer's Life Institute.

HOW DO YOU USE SUNDAY SCHOOL TO DISCIPLE YOUR PEOPLE FOR MINISTRY?

ROSS: One way we have seen growth is in our Wednesday night training. One fourth to one half of our classes are for training people for involvement. We train altar workers, ushers,

because of our growth and the shortage of facilities. We still have a children's Sunday school through sixth grade and middle school. This is the more traditional approach to Sunday school. From high school up we have changed to a training format. We encourage people to become involved in a discipleship program to learn more about who they are in Christ. Then they discover spiritual gifts, how to use the gifts, and opportunities for ministry. When individuals finish the Sunday morning training, they

HOW HAS SUNDAY SCHOOL BEEN AN EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM PROGRAM? HOW DO YOU USE SUNDAY SCHOOL TO DISCIPLE NEW CONVERTS?

ROSS: We start with an alpha program, Dare To Ask Anything. New converts are given a personal invitation into a discipleship class on Wednesday night or Sunday morning and paired with mentors. They are trained quickly into the responsibility of growing in their spiritual life. In this program new converts can ask questions about what it

We encourage people to become involved in a discipleship program to learn more about who they are in Christ.

—DeLeon



future teachers, Royal Ranger leaders, and other leadership positions. After 6 months, these new workers are involved in some aspect of ministry and are being mentored by other leaders. The average class size decreased when we doubled the number of classes we offered. But these smaller classes give us closer oversight for mentoring and prayer. As people become involved in these ministries, the maturity and growth are evident. Families are becoming more stable. It's been exciting to watch people grow.

DELEON: We decided to make a change in our Sunday school format

immediately go into additional training. This prepares them to be group leaders, whether they teach Sunday school for children or become a part of another ministry in the church. Regardless of where they are involved, we require a more formal training called *Koinonia*. Our Sunday morning activities are primarily geared to disciple, train, and develop leaders.

We also use Monday nights for training and development. On Tuesday nights we have a more formal school for people who do not have a solid Bible background. We encourage our people to go to our Tuesday night Bible training program.

means to be a Christian. We lose far fewer new converts because their first contact is in a small group, whether it's a discipleship group or an intimate prayer group. They are being helped immediately.

Many people are finding Christ through our Christian education program. We go out Wednesday night after class and talk to our visitors. If we lead them to Christ, then they get excited and come back. This has its own momentum. People are being saved in other services beside Sunday morning. Our theme is any time, any place is a good time to find Jesus.

DELEON: Evangelism is one of our

main goals and is part of everything we do. I tell my congregation that if we're not reaching people through a particular ministry, then we need to ask whether we should continue this ministry. Sunday school has become a major avenue to bring new people into the church. New people are looking for Bible training and other areas of ministry that take care of their needs. We take advantage of the fact they are coming and do everything possible to ensure they accept Christ as their Savior.

DAVIS: Having Sunday school on Wednesday nights allows us to do things to make Sunday school more evangelistic. For example, on Wednesday night we start at 5:30 and have several adults help kids with their schoolwork. This was a vision brought on by one of our teachers. Fifteen to 20 kids and youth come every week. After the tutoring, we feed them and then send them to their class. We added about 15 to 20 unchurched kids and two families in the first year of doing this. We are building relationships with the parents and grandparents of these kids, and when they have prayer needs, they call the church.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A SOLID PENTECOSTAL CURRICULUM TO YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL?

DAVIS: It is very important to our Sunday school program. A variety of curricula are available to churches today, but Radiant Life curriculum has improved tremendously over the last few years. My teachers have said that it's much easier to prepare each Sunday's lesson. They walk into the classroom with more confidence.

ROSS: I agree. Radiant Life material has been helpful to speed up the preparation process. It's very user-friendly. We have classes on the baptism in the Holy Spirit using curriculum both Wednesdays and Sundays to let students know our distinctives. Our doctrine class has a 6-week period

where students discuss what makes a Pentecostal church Pentecostal. That builds an excitement about seeking the Lord, and it affects our Sunday services. People come in looking forward to an experience with the Lord.

HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE PERCEPTION OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT SUNDAY SCHOOL IS A RELIC OF THE PAST? WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THE PASTOR WHOSE SUNDAY SCHOOL IS DYING?

ROSS: The danger is for a pastor to believe that because people do not come to Sunday school they do not desire to grow. Another danger is to throw a program at a person versus having an actual effective ministry. People follow passion when they believe there is a viable by-product to help them live a better life. I tell others that we have Sunday school not just to learn something, but to become something.

When a church starts growing, it must evaluate what is effective and what is not effective. We concluded that it's best to do fewer things better and give them full attention. You can have a lot of programs that look good on paper, but aren't effective. They do not produce genuine New Testament growth, spiritually or numerically. We had to evaluate: Is this program effective?

In our culture, people make choices for you. You can no longer manipulate them into activities they don't want to attend. If it's not effective and doesn't meet their needs, they're not there next week. So we simplify things. We focus on celebration, which means worship and experiencing God, and then relationships in small groups. Maturity is also one of three major issues. We believe in putting forth effort, being creative, and training our teachers. That takes time. Too often we bail out too quickly because we don't see initial momentum or excitement. But as you strive for excellence, people say, "Man, I went there, and that was worth it."

I have a men's discipleship meeting at 6:15 a.m. on Tuesday at Chicagoland.

That's not easy, but we have 350 men who come to study men's issues from the Bible. It meets a need; they're there for 1 hour and 15 minutes, and it includes breakfast. If you keep the Word of God relevant to their issues, they keep coming back.

Sometimes ministries die because people are not doing the work. It takes a lot of work to create desire, to get people out, and to have effective classes that are meeting needs. You need to have meetings with teachers, be organized, and be patient. If it's not working, find what will work best for your church and your locale. It's not an option. You cannot build the kingdom of God on a Sunday morning sermon, no matter how effective the preacher. There has to be small-group involvement in discipling and studying. People need biblical knowledge to be effective Christians. You may make a few mistakes along the way, but it will start to grow.

I would tell ministers not to get discouraged because God is pro Sunday school. Find the method or tool that is most effective for your people and keep after it.

DELEON: Every pastor needs to take a hard look at his or her congregation and ask how to bring new life into the church, especially a church that's not inspiring, not winning people. There's something missing. Many times we overlook training people who can contribute to the church. The name Sunday school may have the connotation that it's not relevant anymore. Change the name if you must, but don't let the name Sunday school scare you. It's a time during the week to get people to the next level in their growth with the Lord. People go to church on Sunday morning. We need to take advantage of that.

People who are open to the Spirit have discovered a freshness about coming to church. And not just to attend a worship service on Sunday morning, but to be trained and developed, to become greater disciples of the Lord.

DAVIS: I'm the type of person that if it's not working, I'm not going to drop it. We're going to ask, "What's wrong with it? Why aren't we seeing growth in Sunday school?" A pastor needs to evaluate the Sunday school program and ask why it is dying, and then make a list of reasons for its decline.

One of our problems on Sunday mornings was lack of teachers. We had individuals who worked every other Sunday and couldn't teach Sunday school. We asked them when would be the best time to have Sunday school if a shortage of teachers were the

is where I learned to find Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John through the sword drills. I learned all the great Bible stories. I look at the kids who are in our Sunday school and those who are not, and there is a big difference in their Bible knowledge. I would encourage pastors to pray and think long and hard before they decide to cancel Sunday school. We need to realize our culture is different from what it was 25 or 30 years ago.

Several churches in Wyoming have switched to a Wednesday night Sunday school because that is what

worship and other expressions of our faith. But we have forgotten that it is vital that we develop the potential of every person who comes to our church. Pastors need to look closely at what their church is doing to develop members to their fullest potential. We have many Christians sitting in our pews who are displaying a superficial Christianity. We must do something before we lose this present generation to mediocrity.

ROSS: This is a new day. There's a growing awareness in our Fellowship and

When we went from the teacher lecturing to interaction and graduated classes with specific goals, our Christian education program exploded.—Ross




problem. We found that Wednesday night worked well. As pastors, we must be open to different approaches to doing Sunday school. You shouldn't keep Sunday school on Sunday morning for the sake of tradition, especially if the program is dying.

For pastors who think Sunday school is a relic of the past, they are missing a great opportunity to disciple people. Preaching the Word on Sunday morning is valuable, but preaching alone is not going to get the discipleship process done, especially in the youth. I would ask pastors where they received much of their knowledge of the Bible. Sunday school

works best for them. Whether we agree or not, the church is in competition with the activities of the secular world. We must provide ministries that complement people's schedules, not ones that work against them. The book, *Give Them What They Want* by Michael Clarensau and Clancy Hayes, offers ideas and plans to change ministries in the church that are not working.

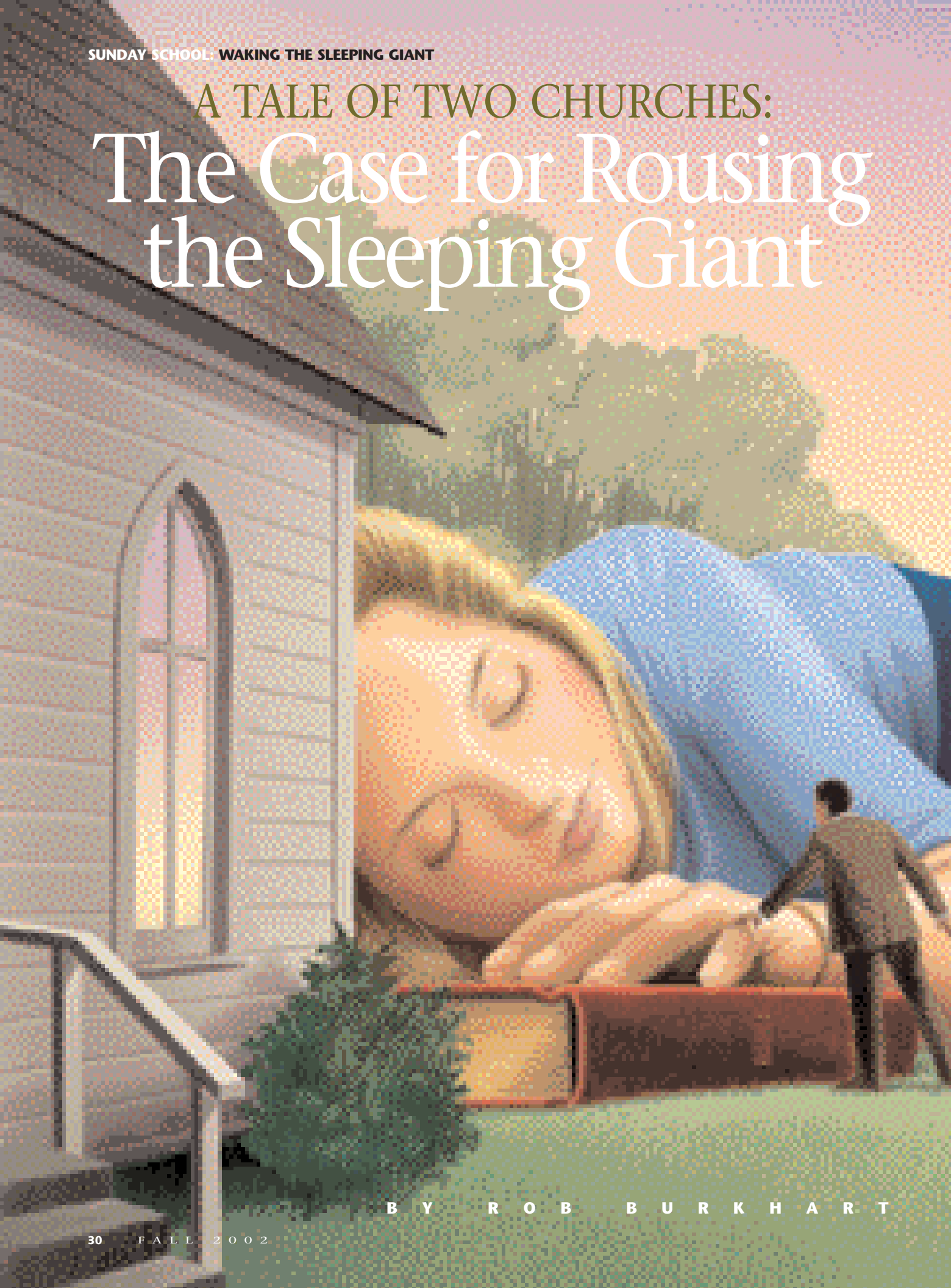
ANY CLOSING THOUGHTS ON THE SUBJECT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL?

DELEON: The climate of this country is demanding the best we can offer. We have become excited about

in people coming to our churches of the importance of being grounded in the Word. We are also seeing those who want to have a Pentecostal experience with the power it brings. They want their families anchored. They're aware of the battles they're facing. When we develop a New Testament holistic approach to ministry, families live better. There's fruit that comes from not neglecting Sunday school or discipleship. I want to encourage the pastors to not give up on this. If it's a God idea, God has a way to get it done. Just keep praying and seeking and studying until you find the model that's best for you. 

SUNDAY SCHOOL: WAKING THE SLEEPING GIANT

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES: The Case for Rousing the Sleeping Giant



B Y R O B B U R K H A R T

(The story of these two churches is true. Names, dates, places, statistics, and other details have been altered.)

In 1976, America was emerging from the humiliation of Vietnam, Watergate, and Richard Nixon's resignation. That summer, while the world celebrated the Olympic spirit in Montreal, America marked its bicentennial. Across the nation communities celebrated in every conceivable way. Boston harbor, the site of that famous tea party, hosted a parade of tall ships. Americans planted gardens, sewed quilts, staged concerts and plays, buried time capsules, and created songs, poems, sculptures, and paintings. The streets were filled with parades, and city parks seemed overrun with Revolutionary War reenactments. Every possible surface was festooned with red, white, and blue. On the Fourth of July, Americans went to old-fashioned picnics, complete with pie-eating contests and wheelbarrow races. That night magnificent fireworks displays filled the skies as Americans paused to reflect and rejoice in their

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

That same year two congregations in the same metropolitan area looked with hope to the future. Both welcomed new pastors with great enthusiasm and expectations. These men took up their duties within a month of each other. And, in a strange coincidence, 13 years later and within a few months of each other, both left their congregations.

In some ways these churches and men were very similar. Both were Assemblies of God churches. Both congregations experienced tremendous growth during the tenure of these pastors. Both launched Christian schools. Both relocated to new facilities. Both surrounded themselves with an outstanding pastoral staff and lay leadership. Both leaders and congregations were committed to missions at home and around the world. Both left an outstanding legacy for their successors.

In other ways the churches and men were very different. Both men were great leaders, but they had very different leadership and personal styles. Both were great churches, but they had very different histories. Congregation "A" was one of the Fellowship's great historic churches with a long and honored past. While more than twice the size of

salt-of-the-earth, hard-working, blue-collar people of the other.

Both churches grew dramatically during the tenure of these two pastors. But they grew differently. At the end of 5 years, morning worship attendance at congregation "B" had more than doubled, from 439 in 1976 to 949 in 1980. Growth in the same period at congregation "A" was not as dramatic (1,100 in 1976 to 1,300 in 1980). By the end of each pastor's tenure in 1989, morning worship at congregation "B" had exploded and averaged 2,659, while congregation "A" had grown steadily to 1,802.

As these congregations transitioned to new leadership in 1989, both faced incredible struggles. When the time came, both congregations excitedly welcomed new pastors. In less than 2 years, both new pastors were forced to leave under a cloud of controversy. Again, each church sought and found another pastor. They, too, were both gone in less than 15 months. Both churches then had an extended period with no pastoral leadership. Experienced and valued members of the pastoral staff, key lay leaders, and influential families drifted away from both. Ultimately both needed, sought, and received help from their Fellowship's district office.

During the short tenure of these last two pastors, conflict, controversy, and bitter battles over the style and substance of each pastor's ministry had erupted in both congregations. Each pastor's vision and

heritage. It was quite a party.

That summer Americans put the tragedies of Vietnam and Watergate behind them and focused on the glory of their beginnings, the achievements of their past, and looked with hope to a new and bright future.

its younger sister, congregation "A" was in a slow and steady decline. Congregation "B" did not have the heritage or history, but was a church on the rise. These churches served different kinds of people. The largely white-collar and professional congregation of one was very different from the

leadership had seemed at odds with the church's past and the dreams and desires of its lay leaders. Both congregations fractured under the pressure of the struggle for control of the church and its future. Hundreds became religious refugees, seeking and finding safe haven in other congregations.

Finally, both congregations found new long-term leaders. They believed these men would help them overcome their struggles, regain their past prominence, and lead them into a bright future.

WEATHERING THE STORM

The churches faced and weathered these storms very differently.

Between 1989 and 1991 morning worship attendance at congregation “B” dropped by more than 50 percent, and within 5 years had dropped from its peak of 2,659 to 757. The collapse of Sunday school was even more dramatic. At its peak, congregation “B” reported 2,570 in Sunday school. Within 4 years, attendance bottomed out to an average attendance of just 53. In 1993 the Sunday school rebounded slightly, but morning worship continued to decline.

Congregation “A” also suffered losses. But its losses, in both average Sunday school and morning worship attendance, were measured in the hundreds not the thousands. From its peak of 1,802 average morning worship attendance in 1989, 3 years later congregation “A” dropped to 1,410. In that same period Sunday school attendance dropped from an average of 1,447 to 1,277.

SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The circumstances leading to the rise and fall of these two churches are a complex web of many different factors. No one factor can account for all that happened. But the important place of Sunday school in this story cannot be overlooked.

Congregation “A” had a long tradition of high-quality, closely graded, small-group oriented Sunday school complete with an effective recruiting and training strategy. Congregation “B” did not. In the middle of the transition, Sunday school attendance at congregation “A” actually rose slightly (from 1,228 in 1990 to 1,277 in 1991). When the storms came, the Sunday school,

with its network of relationships, mature lay leaders, and strong sense of community and mission stood firm.

Congregation “B” reported much larger Sunday school attendance during its rise, and dropped much faster and further. A look behind the numbers reveals that congregation “B” never developed the same kind of strong discipling ministry that characterized the Sunday school in congregation “A.” Explosive growth, multiple services, and inadequate facilities made it impossible. Alternatives were tried with varying degrees of success. But congregation “B” was built around the pulpit skills of its pastor and an exciting Sunday morning worship experience. It did not have the internal strength needed to weather the storms and prevent its collapse.

THE REST OF THE STORY

It’s been a roller-coaster ride for congregation “B” since its fourth pastor in 5 years came in 1993. Explosive growth built on the pastor’s considerable pulpit skills and dynamic Sunday morning worship marked his first 5 years. This period of growth was followed by a period of painful contraction. At that time leadership determined it needed to address the instability and immaturity of the congregation.

Its strategy? Build a Sunday school.

In 1991 congregation “A” welcomed its third pastor since 1989. He came believing that Sunday school and other ministries were out of date and determined to introduce a new ministry paradigm. Undervalued and neglected, the Sunday school immediately began to decline. In his first 5 years, Sunday school attendance dropped by more than 50 percent and worship attendance declined each year. After 9 years the Sunday school declined to about 300 and was then disbanded. Worship attendance continued to steadily decline, losing almost 50 percent since its peak and 33 percent since this new pastor came.

Both churches have stopped reporting Sunday school and worship attendance.

LESSONS TO LEARN

Lessons can be learned from these two churches.

1. Congregations built without the internal structures and strength an effective Sunday school creates are more vulnerable and less likely to survive the storms. Big doesn’t equal strong.

2. Not all Sunday schools are created equal. Saying a church has Sunday school isn’t the same as building a truly effective Sunday school ministry.

3. Developing and maintaining an effective Sunday school requires a consistent investment of time, effort, resource, and leadership.

4. Good Sunday schools help the church reach and keep new people.

5. Sunday schools are fragile. What takes decades to build can be quickly destroyed by a lack of vision and neglect.

6. Sunday school is effective in assimilating new people and retaining growth.

7. It is dangerous to rely too heavily on a pastor’s strengths. Churches that develop a network of mature lay leaders through the Sunday school are stronger.

8. Through consistent discipling the Sunday school helps believers mature in their faith. Without individual maturity, congregational maturity is impossible.

9. Sunday schools connect people and build love, loyalty, and unity in ways a morning worship experience can’t.

10. A truly effective Sunday school cannot exist without the vision, leadership, and support of the pastor.

THE POTENTIAL AND PROMISE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The churches described in this article illustrate patterns seen across the nation.

Many churches, like congregation “A,” are abandoning the Sunday school. They believe Sunday school is ineffective and outmoded and that a new era demands new ministry paradigms. In many cases the diagnosis is correct. But the cure is worse than the disease. Many times, abandoning the Sunday school sacrifices ministry infrastructure

essential for a growing, healthy church. In their search for something new, they replace the comprehensive, churchwide ministry of Sunday school with a patchwork of niche ministries. All too often the church grows weaker, not stronger.

Many other churches, like congregation “B,” grow rapidly but not well. Churches that fail to build ministry infrastructure to support morning worship attendance risk collapse. At best they embark on an attendance roller coaster. Attendance rises and falls, only to rise and fall again and again. They never develop the maturity needed to consolidate their gains and develop a pattern of healthy, consistent growth.

The ministry trajectories of both patterns ultimately intersect. Both end up without a cohesive ministry system. Morning worship is increasingly a gathering of strangers, and less and less a gathering of brothers and sisters. Unity suffers. Spiritual growth suffers. Outreach and evangelism suffer. The church is less able to care, to assimilate newcomers, to impact its community, and to develop leaders.

Sunday school is the church’s sleeping giant. Sunday school isn’t a bad idea; on the contrary, it’s a great idea that is often badly done. Quality Sunday schools offer the church and its leadership an effective, comprehensive, and cohesive way to grow a great church. All the qualities of a healthy, growing church and ministry are enabled, supported, and enhanced by a good Sunday school. Here’s what an effective Sunday school ministry can do for your church.

Instruction

The Sunday school, as an age-graded, small-group experience, is an ideal place to teach the Bible. In Sunday school believers can be taught in ways most appropriate to their age and their emotional, social, and spiritual development. When properly trained teachers are given appropriate curricula and resources, facilities and equipment;

when appropriate teacher-learner ratios are observed; and when methodologies that encourage active learning are employed, the Sunday school becomes an effective place for believers to learn and grow.

Evangelism

The Sunday school can be the launchpad of a highly effective and integrated evangelism and assimilation strategy. It is the ideal place to communicate a passion for the lost and give believers the skills needed to effectively share the gospel. The Sunday school offers a less-threatening environment and a place to introduce the unsaved to the life and ministry of the church.

Assimilation, Care, Community, and Unity

The Sunday school is an effective way to assimilate newcomers, meet needs, provide ministry, and build a sense of unity and community. In the Sunday school people of similar age and interest gather to study God’s Word. They can develop friendships, welcome newcomers, and care for each other.

Spiritual Life and Vitality

The Sunday school is an ideal environment for developing and maintaining spiritual vitality. It is a place where believers can discover more about God and experience His power and presence firsthand. It can be the laboratory of the Holy Spirit where believers can pray together and share their spiritual trials and triumphs with trusted friends in a caring, supportive atmosphere.

Christian Action

The Sunday school is the ideal place for informing, motivating, organizing, and carrying out ministry. The powerful combination of a biblical mandate, a pressing need, an effective ministry strategy, and working together to meet that need should be an integral part of the Sunday school’s ministry. As believers are challenged to apply their faith in real and practical ways, they grow

spiritually and develop a deeper and richer relationship with God and each other.

Equipping for Leadership and Ministry

The Sunday school offers an ideal place for ministry training and leadership development. Classes dealing with specific ministry skills can be offered or incorporated into existing classes. The Sunday school offers a tremendous opportunity for mentoring and on-the-job training.

Church leaders have long recognized the value of these eight building blocks. What is lacking in too many churches is a way to bring them together into a cohesive system and organize them for maximum impact. The Sunday school can do just that. Sadly, that ability has been largely overlooked and ignored.

Within many churches this giant sleeps. The Sunday school can play a vital role in growing healthy, strong churches. It can and should do more and be more than it is. But church leaders haven’t expected, organized, or equipped the Sunday school to meet these challenges. Great Sunday schools and great churches don’t just happen. They are built with vision, passion, diligence, and wisdom.

ROUSING THE SLEEPING GIANT IN SEVEN NOT-SO-EASY STEPS

Restoring the Sunday school to the life and ministry of the church isn’t easy, but it is essential.

Step 1: A New Vision of the Sunday School

As long as the emphasis is on the “school” in Sunday school, it will never achieve its full potential. Unfortunately, the concept many church leaders have of the Sunday school is one-dimensional. Sunday school is the teaching ministry of the church. Redefining Sunday school as a comprehensive and ministry strategy by which the church not only teaches but assimilates newcomers, cares for members, equips

believers for ministry, and reaches out in evangelism is the first crucial step.

In life and ministry, people find what they look for and get what they expect. If leaders don't expect the Sunday school to do more, it never will.

Step 2: Build the Systems

Sunday school leadership must develop and maintain several crucial systems. It's not enough to know what should be accomplished. There has to be a way to do it.

First, collect and keep good records. Without an effective way to gather contact information on members and newcomers, it is impossible to care for absent members and reach out to newcomers.

Second, build the organization. Leadership must create an organization that provides support and oversight for teachers. Secretaries, superintendents, and other staff are as essential as teachers.

Third, provide the tools. Make sure the curriculum, supplies, and equipment needed for an exciting classroom experience are available and in place.

Fourth, build a recruiting/training system that provides a stream of new workers and supplies an adequate number of substitute teachers and replacement workers.

Finally, create and implement an appropriate accountability system for teachers and other workers. Set standards high, and expect teachers and workers to meet them. Hold them accountable when they fail, and reward them when they succeed.

Step 3: Build the Team

Sunday school can't and shouldn't try to do it alone. Unfortunately various ministries in a local church aren't well connected. The Sunday school, other ministries, and indeed the church are more effective when they combine their efforts than when they go it alone. Here are a few suggestions.

Nurseries should be open and staffed before and during Sunday school. Teachers and other workers need to

have a place for every member of their family so they can be in place when students arrive.

Ushers and greeters need to be in place, ready to welcome people to Sunday school and help visitors and others find their classes.

Newcomer contact information gathered during the service should be given to the appropriate Sunday school teachers so they can contact family members and invite them to Sunday school.

Midweek programs and the Sunday school should share contact information. Each can support the efforts of the other to reach newcomers and care for absent members.

Fostering clear communication, respect, appreciation, and building a sense of team among these various ministries make them better.

Step 4: Set the Standard

High expectations aren't a barrier to recruitment; they are an asset. Many think asking people to do less makes it more likely they'll do something. In fact, the opposite is true. People want to feel what they do is important. As long as leaders trivialize Sunday school, their Sunday school will be trivial. But high expectations lead to excellence in life and ministry and make recruiting easier.

First, keep the big picture in focus. Sunday school is about impacting the lives, futures, and eternal destinies of the students, their families, and communities. Nothing could be more important or worthwhile.

Clearly articulate the importance of every job. Explain how it fits in and why it is essential to the vision and success of the church and the Sunday school.

Require training before people serve and as they serve, as part of an ongoing investment in their ministry. People perform to the level of their training. Train for excellence and guarantee success. Fail to train and guarantee failure.

Require a minimum service of 1 year with a limited number of "unexcused" absences, and keep track. Expect teachers and workers to be faithful to their

ministry, to attend services, and to fully participate in the life of the church.

Make sure teachers and workers meet the highest standards of personal integrity and spiritual life. Do not tolerate conduct that embarrasses God and the church.

Explain what is expected of your teachers and workers. Hold them to those standards. Those who fail to meet the standards should be counseled, coached, and given every opportunity to grow into their responsibilities. Those who don't should be encouraged to find other places of ministry more suited to their gifts, abilities, and commitment, and they should be challenged to keep growing.

Step 5: Recruit and Train

No ministry, especially the Sunday school, can be successful without an effective strategy to recruit and train new workers. Vacancies are inevitable. New workers are essential for growth. But most ministries don't recruit and train well. Leaders often take the first person willing to serve, with little regard to qualifications, spiritual gifts, abilities, or training. No wonder so many fail.

Successful recruiting can't be based on the church's need. It must be based on the believer's need to serve. All believers are gifted and called to ministry and will be held accountable by God as stewards of their gifts.

Second, crisis- and need-based recruiting communicates failure. Public whining about the lack of dedicated workers doesn't motivate. It discourages. No one wants to be part of a failing organization or serve because leadership can't get anybody else. That's not the message leaders intend to send, but it is what many in the pew hear.

Recruiting must be an ongoing process, not a crisis event. Leaders should continually pray and challenge believers to invest their lives in the cause of Christ. Create a positive recruiting atmosphere by focusing on the great things happening in Sunday school and the joy of ministry.

Don't recruit for position. Recruit for training. Provide and expect new workers to complete a preministry training course lasting no more than 3 months. It should encourage people to discover their spiritual gifts, examine opportunities, review expectations, and explore the lifestyle and spiritual requirements.

Follow this classroom experience with on-the-job training. Let your best teachers and workers invest in and mentor them.

Finally, place new workers with their gift, callings, and interests in mind. Find round pegs for round holes. Failure to place workers promptly and appropriately derails the recruiting/training process.

Step 6: Motivate and Challenge

Continually encourage, challenge, and motivate the Sunday school staff. This can take many forms.

Teachers and workers should be expected to participate in monthly ongoing training to help them grow and become more effective.

Leaders should publicly acknowledge the achievements of teachers, workers, and the Sunday school.

Establish a prayer network, and ask the congregation to pray for teachers and workers. This not only encourages teachers and workers, but also keeps the Sunday school on their hearts and minds.

Plan an annual recognition service that celebrates the victories and recognizes the accomplishments of the Sunday school and its teachers and workers.

Hold people accountable for their ministry, appreciate their achievements, and help them to succeed.

Failure to motivate, appreciate, and challenge workers communicates that their ministry isn't really important.

Step 7: Plan To Grow

A healthy Sunday school grows. But growth isn't automatic. A few simple steps can keep the Sunday school growing.

First, adhere to student-teacher ratios and square-footage-per-student needs.

Both staff and space are critical factors that can limit growth.

Second, devise and implement a newcomer and absentee follow-up strategy, and expect workers to follow through.

A growing Sunday school should add workers and classes annually based on clear growth goals. Make sure these new classes and teachers have the support, equipment, supplies, and facilities they need.

Make growth and outreach a priority for teachers and workers.

Train teachers to lead their students to the Lord and challenge them to personally present the gospel to each student.

Finally, make sure teachers and workers know that outreach and assimilation are essential parts of their ministry, and they are an important part of the church's evangelism strategy.

THE LAST WORD


What I have described above is not what most people imagine when they think of Sunday school. And, it isn't what most people who attend Sunday school experience on Sunday morning. Creating and maintaining this kind of Sunday school isn't easy.

But here is the bottom line. To fulfill God's purposes in the world the church must reach the lost and help

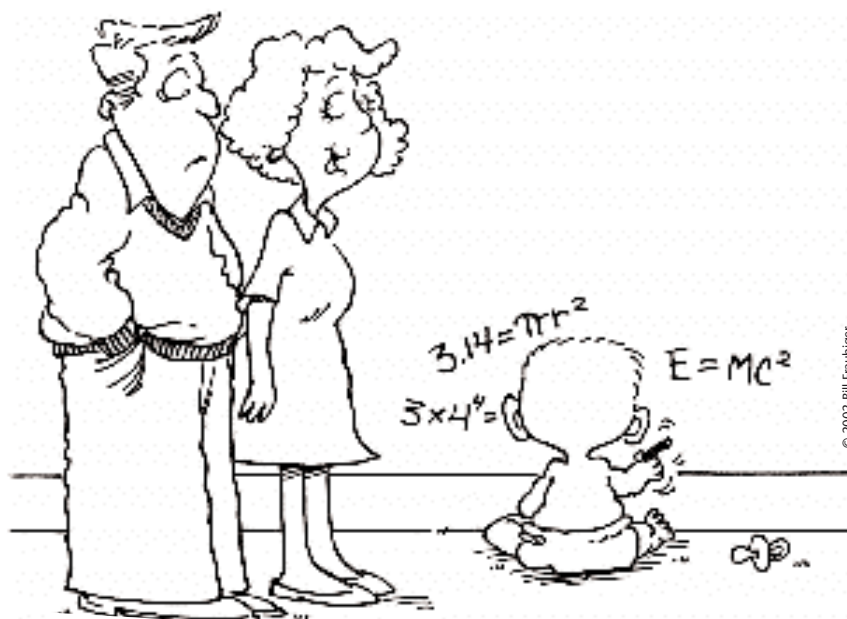
them become fully devoted disciples. The church must help believers grow to spiritual maturity and give expression to their love of God in worship and their daily lives. It must help create the bonds of love and loyalty within the church and bear witness to God's truth, in both word and deed, in the world. Failure is not an option. But many are failing.

Of all the ministries available to the church, the Sunday school has the greatest potential to achieve these ends. It is the ideal tool. An outstanding infrastructure of curricula and training is already available. The church is demonstrably better able to fulfill God's purposes with a good Sunday school than without one.

Finally, the church needs quality Sunday schools today more than ever. Far too many congregations are adrift with no vision and no strategy. It is a formula for disaster. God will give the vision, and the Sunday school offers the strategy.

It's time to awaken the sleeping giant. 

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"I don't know what they are teaching them in the nursery lately, but I hope they keep it up!"

How Do We Get From Fun to Fundamentals?

Using the advertising illustration as a model, we might picture the result of good Christian teaching like this: A student wipes the traces of milk from her face and asks the church: "Got meat?"

B Y B I L L I E D A V I S



It has fun and play value," a marketer said of a new carbonated cereal "that sizzles and pops in your mouth." According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, marketers are trying to put bubbles in everything because "it is a big selling point for kids.

Carbon dioxide is bubbling up in some surprising places [as marketers] seek more excitement for their products." E-moo is carbonated milk that claims to put fun into drinking milk. "Carbonation provides food and drink with entertainment value. When you bite into a bubbly pear . . . it's completely fun."

Three popular ideas are being carried to extremes that threaten to destroy the church's teaching ministry: change, market, and fun. We have been convinced, mostly by marketing strategists, that everything is quickly obsolete. Change is presented as a positive value almost without exception. Any type of resistance to change is presented as old and bad. The word *fun* is used to sell not only toys, sports, vacation trips, and movies, but also food, clothing, furniture, automobiles, computers . . . and now the Sunday school. We are almost forced to believe that every value must be sold, just as any product on the market, and the best way to sell it is to make it seem like fun. Words such as *school*, *study*, and *education* are to be avoided. We call our classes fellowships and name them for popular television programs.

Producers of curriculum materials emphasize that the lessons are fun and easy to prepare. All you need is in this colorful box. How would you feel about your calling and preparation for ministry if all you needed were a packaged sermon and a video presentation designed by experts in entertainment? How do Christian educators who feel a call to ministry adapt to the idea that our success depends on shaping a product as fun to target a specific market? How do we respond to the current emphasis on fun and entertainment as

ideal tools for gospel outreach and Christian education?

THINK ABOUT IT

"It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other."* These words from Ecclesiastes 7:18 describe the ministry of education. Education looks both ways. It preserves truth and knowledge from the past and provides the foundation on which to build appropriately for the future. We study and pray so we can grasp the truth of God's eternal plan. Being educated means we have received knowledge and wisdom from those who have left us the results of their studies, thinking, and experience. Then we study and pray and work to understand cultural trends that shape thinking and behavior in the present. Our purpose is to share the Christian heritage, and also to stimulate new thinking and action. Extreme positions usually lead to confusion and error. So we must teach that God's truth is absolute, and that it can also be applied in innovative ways. God does not change. Cultures change. The basic needs of people do not change. Culture creates new situations that require us to meet basic needs in appropriate ways. The function of education is to preserve the past, develop present potential, and stimulate future outcomes.

The idea of change threatens Christian education when leaders, believing that postmodern children and youth reject all tradition, go to extremes. For example, teachers and children's pastors may take everything that seems religious from meeting rooms. They paint the walls with distorted faces and animals and scenes from science fiction. They try to turn each lesson into a game or a TV program. They think everything must be as new and exciting as the latest wireless technology. They fail to grasp the importance of unchanging sacredness. I have read the words of megachurch pastors advising us to eliminate Bibles from the pews and even suggesting that old-timers who insist on carrying Bibles so obviously to the services will intimidate the unchurched visitors.

This is what I mean by extreme reaction that goes beyond real understanding of human nature and basic human needs.

Studies in human development find that children do not like too much change. Unless they are especially stimulated to want a new product, most of them prefer the familiar. They get excited and enjoy media presentations, but they are influenced most by a familiar voice that is warm and loving. Adolescents do not dislike all tradition. They do not drop out of church because it is too traditional unless we are so rigid and judgmental they feel misunderstood and rejected. We usually lose young people because we fail to include them and connect them in meaningful ways to a Christian heritage. Often what we take for rebellion or disdain for tradition is really a cry of frustration.

An example is a report called "New Wheels for Generation Y." At a showing of concept cars a respected designer declared, "The kids today dress casual and carry all this entertainment. We will give some fantasy, some excitement We will take people to a different world."

But a young design student disagreed, saying, "That would be a huge mistake. People have this stereotypical image that young people want [something] totally off the wall In reality, they want something smart . . . but that doesn't translate into bizarro."

Neither new generations nor secular people want us to change everything to suit them. They want life to make sense. They want us to understand them, love them, and make them a part of our lives. They need empathy and appreciation more than they need change and fun.

HOW EDUCATIONAL IS ENTERTAINMENT?

Good teachers have always devised interesting and pleasant ways of presenting lesson content. Persons of all ages have always found real pleasure and satisfaction in learning. The idea of trying intentionally to make learning into fun was born out of television.

One of the first programs to claim a teaching goal was *Sesame Street*. Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, says the program was generally approved by educators who thought it would help teach children to read and encourage them to love school. A number of studies and experiments with the results have indicated that children do not learn content from cute puppets and catchy tunes any better than they learn from good, traditional teaching. The studies show that children do remember some of the content intended as education, but they remember more about the characters and the drama. Numerous reports from other sources agree with Postman's statement that TV programs teach children to love TV programs, not school.

In a report of how children and parents rate popular video programs that have biblical themes, we see the same tendency to remember more about the action and technology than about the message they were intended to deliver. Children and parents who viewed some popular Christian videos were asked to give ratings and make comments. Most gave good ratings, saying the presentations were well done, biblically sound, and interesting to watch. But among the kids no one mentioned God or the Bible. One child mentioned a specifically moral lesson. All other comments related to the jokes, technology, actors, music, and cool or scary adventures. Not one child mentioned a biblical truth learned from the videos. No one made the connection between a video character and a Bible character. None of the parents' comments included mention of God. One mentioned a moral theme. All other comments referred to the fine technology and production. The point is, as many careful scholars have declared, the medium very much influences the message. Tools such as video and dramatic presentations of magic tricks and clowns must be used judiciously to keep viewers from remembering more about the presentation than about the lesson it is supposed to teach.

"WHY IS JESUS LIKE MY DOG? IS HE A GERMAN SHEPHERD?"

The greatest flaw in educational entertainment is the belief that children can understand metaphors and allegorical stories. Evidence of this is found in the numerous supposedly funny stories of how children react. One example is the way an adult class laughed about the boy who asked if Jesus were a German shepherd like his dog. A good teacher sees beyond the humor. Children need explicit explanations. They learn more from plain words, such as Jesus loves you, than they do from stories about a good shepherd or some vegetable that cares for sheep. Even adolescents and many adults are confused or simply entertained by fun games and cartoons that are supposed to teach a lesson. Sometimes brightly colored drawings, fast-moving video images, and stirring rhythms disguise more than they express.

Dawson McAllister, a proclaimed expert on youth and culture, says, "Teenagers are entertained to death. They love it, but" He says young people will tire quickly of one kind of fun and look for something more exciting. He quoted a survey of 30,000 teenagers who had stayed in church for some time. The question was, "Why do you stay?" Only 3.6 percent of the teens chose "fun," but 57.1 percent chose, "It's helped me to grow as a Christian."

HOW DOES MARKET RELATE TO MISSION?

The most persuasive argument for the use of culturally relevant tools and methods is that we must make a bridge between the church and the culture to attract unchurched persons. We feel that Jesus left us with a mission, and in today's terms, we must sell the message of salvation. So, we find a way to market the message. This leads us to copy advertising and entertainment strategies. In our sincere desire to gain the interest and attention of the unchurched, we sometimes go to extremes and give more attention to marketing than to the mission.

In a recent secular publication, a writer explained some advantages of Christian schools. He claimed they offer good teaching, and the influence of the market has forced them to moderate the role of religion. He said market forces soften religion as schools compete to attract students. This makes Christian schools more acceptable in the general society. He thought he was making a positive statement, but to us it is a warning.

Relevant also is the complaint we read in many national publications about grade inflation in our schools and universities. A University of Missouri professor writes: "Universities are now modeled after the corporation . . . Students are called customers and vice presidents fret over providing the best customer service. What's the very best way to keep customers happy? Give them what they want."

Our challenge is (1) to be aware and relevant to reach our market without allowing cultural adaptations to soften the message, and (2) not to be so consumed with providing immediate pleasant experience that we neglect the teaching ministry. McAllister says his experience leads him to conclude that we should not be negative and condemning of cultural trends, but on the other hand, ". . . if you and I model the love of God and let young men and women see our hearts and our values, we can focus far more on our purpose . . . and far less on the external trappings of the culture."

Among the best examples of moves toward cultural adaptation are church-sponsored youth clubs where hip-hop music is the vehicle for ministry. Recently *Christianity Today* published a thoughtful report in which the authors liken hip-hop ministry to intercultural strategies used by missionaries to evangelize unreached peoples. They cite leaders of popular youth clubs who explain how they use hip-hop "to shine a light on the message of the gospel."


A youth minister explains that hip-hop music promotes brutal honesty and expresses the need of young persons to

keep it real. "We must be willing to acknowledge our own shortcomings," he says, and help youth to "experience a biblical message within their own cultural context." Older Christians can seem self-righteous and unwilling to make appropriate adaptations to the needs of questioning and seeking younger generations. We must appreciate people and accept them as products of our culture.

Then in a striking example of post-modern syncretism, the authors of this article quote another youth leader, "Our use of rap and hip-hop is just the milk of getting people to the meat of discipleship and biblical truth." They advise us to use popular exciting strategies as our milk to get people into the gospel. They close the article with a popular line from advertising, asking the church: Got milk?

Biblical use of the milk metaphor is not that milk is given to attract infants. It is given to nourish infants. Nourishment is not the same as simple attraction. Entertainment may serve to attract. Education is to nourish. We must be careful not to become so involved with cultural relevance and marketing strategies that we neglect basic educational goals and teaching

skills. Peter says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2,3). Fun and entertainment endanger spiritual growth when we go to extremes. They can create appetites for something ever more exciting, like carbonated milk and tingly blue pears.

Using the advertising illustration as a model, we might picture the result of good Christian teaching like this: A student wipes the traces of milk from his face and asks the church: "Got meat?" 

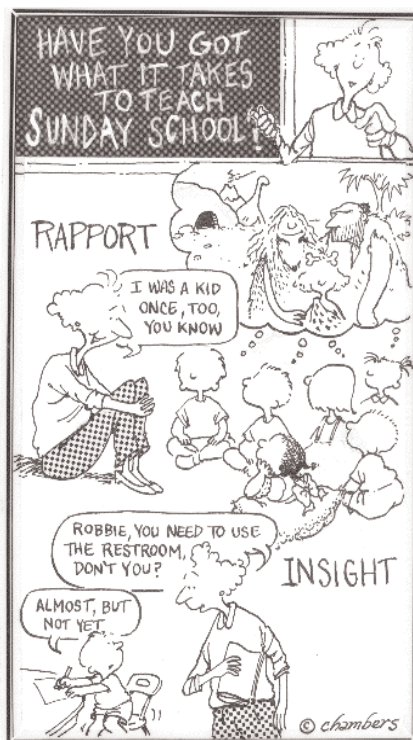
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*Scripture references are from the New International Version.

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Sunday School: There's More Than One Way To Do It

BY LEROY R. BARTEL



The voice of the pastor on the telephone was filled with concern. He said he had tried everything he knew, and yet the Sunday school in his church was dying on the vine. He was not only concerned; he was frustrated. Adult Sunday school attendance was down and youth Sunday school was almost nonexistent. Children's Sunday school remained intact, but attendance was in serious decline. Parents were dropping their kids off and going home to wait for the Sunday morning worship service. Those who had served as teachers seemed unwilling to teach anymore. He told me, "Don't misunderstand. I'm committed to Sunday school, but what can I do? What we've always done in the past isn't working. We've got to find a new way of doing it or something. I don't want to scrap it."

What can you tell a pastor like that? He's discouraged, but his heart is right. He recognizes that what Sunday school represents—Bible study and discipling in small-group settings—is vital. What he struggles with is how to make this essential ministry function effectively in changing times and modern cultural shifts.

Some pastors have abandoned Sunday school or an equivalent ministry altogether. Others have let it suffer from pastoral neglect, allowing it to languish and move inexorably toward death. Others have grabbed some exciting, novel approach and never bothered to ask whether or not children, young people, or adults were growing in their Christian lives.

More and more you hear it articulated. The whispers are becoming more vocal. Many church leaders are admitting it was a mistake to de-emphasize or abandon Sunday school. They recognize that the church desperately needs a purposeful, coordinated, total-church approach for making disciples.

Traditionally, Sunday school has been held on Sunday morning just before the worship service. That approach is still effective in many situations. However, there are new and creative approaches to Christian education that reach beyond the Sunday morning model. The good news is this: There is more than one way to do Sunday school.

For Sunday school and the ministry function it represents within the local church to be effective today, some things will need to change. On the other hand, there are essential, nonnegotiable

ministry issues that must not change. What are some of the key issues that must be given consideration in each area for Sunday school ministry to flourish?

WHAT MUST NOT CHANGE— THE NONNEGOTIABLE ELEMENTS

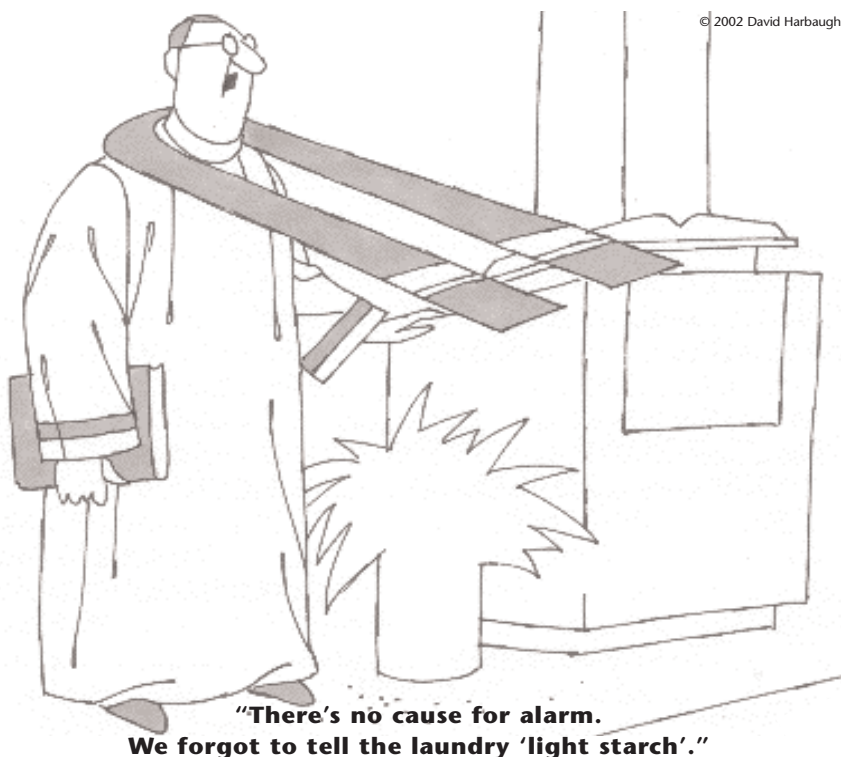
The importance of getting people involved in Bible study must not change. When people come to Christ or experience personal revival, these experiences are inevitably accompanied by a hunger and thirst for God's Word. It is part of their spiritual DNA. Wise church leaders understand the critical importance of getting new believers into the Word. The Bible is clear about the importance of Bible study (2 Timothy 3:15–17). It is impossible to make disciples without getting them into the Bible and getting the Bible into them. Every pastor should adhere to this passionate and nonnegotiable value: Every person in our church needs to be involved in systematic Bible study within the context of a small group to grow into a mature, effective Christian. This value must be embraced wholeheartedly and strategies must be developed and implemented to make it a reality.

"This Book is my all-sufficient guide

for faith and conduct" is an historic statement of the church to express the importance of the Bible in the believer's life. The natural application of this statement is that every class offered by the local church should ultimately be a Bible study. We may offer a wide variety of classes in the local church designed to meet people's needs and attract participation, but the bottom line must be what Scripture has to say about that topic. An academic awareness of Bible content is not the goal. For transformation to take place, Bible study must be applicationally oriented. "What difference does it make in our daily lives?" and "What are we going to do about it?" are key questions that must be asked. In Sunday school we need to study the Bible.

Another nonnegotiable is systematic study of Bible content and doctrine. It is not sufficient to study a few pet topics, contemporary issues, or simply cater to the desires and interests of sincere people. No wise parent structures her family meals based only on the personal preferences of small children. Likewise, responsible spiritual leaders will insist that those they lead participate in a systematic study of Bible content, basic Christian doctrine, and the essentials of the Christian life along with a full integration of Pentecostal distinctives. This is the very kind of approach a reputable Sunday school curriculum like *Radiant Life* provides.

The importance of small-group contexts to the life of the local church must not change. The large celebration-oriented contexts in which we worship God collectively should not be minimized. On the other hand, no church is biblically structured if it does not value and prioritize the importance of fellowship within small-group settings. This was a part of the dynamic of the local church from the very beginning. Acts 2:42–47 makes it clear that both large- and small-group settings were a part of the life of the Early Church. The kind of learning, care, accountability, ministry, and fellowship provided in small-group



settings must not be sacrificed today either. These things cannot be adequately provided within larger congregational gatherings. It's a fact—every church that grows larger must continue to remain small through small groups. Sunday school can help this become a reality in the local church.

Finally, for Sunday school and what it represents to thrive, it must have an outward focus. It is not sufficient to provide nurture and discipleship; it must reach the lost. The warm fellowship of a Sunday school class and the exciting participative Bible study it encourages are often the ideal climate for a neighbor, friend, or family member to find Christ. The fellowship functions of the class provide opportunities to invite guests and open the door for conversations about the Lord. The class that only has an inward focus violates the Great Commission and is dying. It just doesn't know it yet.

WHAT CAN AND MUST CHANGE

Effective churches with vibrant, effective Sunday schools or equivalent ministries evidence variety in how this essential ministry called Sunday school is delivered. The essential elements must remain the same; the delivery system, however, may vary. There is plenty of opportunity for exciting innovation without sacrificing the indispensable fundamentals. So what can and must change?

The teaching must change. In the past, the teacher was viewed as an interesting and capable lecturer. He or she dispensed biblical information and inspirational presentations to students who listened. That has changed. Effective Bible studies today are participative, filled with interesting activities and discussions. Teachers are viewed more as facilitators and guides rather than lecturers and instructors. The total class context is guided and managed by a team of people, not a single person. Fellowship is front-ended and pervasive in the class and helps provide the interactive context in which learning takes place.

The days of the week that Bible study

is offered can be expanded. Sunday morning has been the time-honored and almost sacred day for Sunday school. Many effective pastors recognize, however, that if the goal is to have a high percentage of the congregation participate in Bible study, it must be offered at other times as well.

Consequently, innovative churches are offering Bible study opportunities Sunday afternoon or evening, Wednesday night, and almost any day that is convenient to those they are seeking to involve. However, there are definite advantages to keeping the main expression of Bible study on

SUNDAY SCHOOL: A FUNCTIONAL DESCRIPTION

A committee made up of key leaders within the Division of Christian Education in the Assemblies of God responded to the concern about what was happening to Sunday school in many of our churches. We were concerned that our Movement was in danger of becoming so locked into preserving a particular form of ministry that God had mightily used in the past that we would fail to innovate or affirm creative variations of Sunday school ministry in the present.

This committee was asked to identify the essential characteristics, features, and functions of Sunday school in the past to determine what would constitute a functional equivalent ministry in the present. They developed a document that was approved for use in the Annual Church Ministries Report as a means of answering the questions related to Sunday school/Christian education.

Historically Sunday school has been the primary discipling strategy of our churches. It has proven its effectiveness for building people at every age and stage of life and has provided opportunities for them to discover and develop their unique God-given gifts.

In changing times and diverse cultures, however, it is imperative that the church affirm and retain the primary elements of effective discipling methods. Therefore, any Christian education initiative in the local church that includes all of the following features/characteristics would be considered functionally comparable to Sunday school:

1. **The primary purpose** is obedient response to the Great Commission: Making disciples who will fulfill the threefold mission of the church—evangelism, worship, and discipleship.
2. **The primary strategy** is the intentional, systematic development of leaders who can carry on the work of the ministry in the local church.
3. **The primary curriculum** is the Bible supported by appropriate teaching resources.
4. **The primary process** is regular (preferably weekly), systematic, and thorough teaching of Bible content and doctrine.
5. **The primary dynamic** is the building of relationships that involve mutual commitment and accountability.
6. **The primary structure** includes a full range of groups, developed with sensitivity to culture, needs, interests, and/or life stages.
7. **The primary oversight** is the responsibility of the pastoral staff and church lay leaders in the local church.

—LeRoy R. Bartel, Longview, Washington

Sunday—built-in child care, a kind of full-service day with worship and Bible study, something for the entire family. But Sunday isn't the only day.

There may be many different places where people gather for Bible study. Using this approach, lack of Christian education space at the church becomes less of a problem. In fact, innovative church leaders welcome the opportunity to offer Bible study in a variety of locations. They vary the sites to meet needs

the Word approach Sunday or midweek (and even provide certificates or diplomas). Some have several classes going concurrently in a large fellowship hall with table-talk studies where each table hosts a different study.

The topics that can be studied are many and varied. In addition to the systematic, inductive study of various books of the Bible, there are contemporary topics that interest people (abortion, euthanasia, gambling, the

expression, the local church offers Bible studies on other days as well. Bible study opportunities are made available to meet a wide range of needs at any time, place, and location that is convenient. The goal is to encourage the participation of every person in a local church in at least one Bible study opportunity.

Here are some questions for the key leaders of your church to consider making a full-menu approach a reality:

Responsible spiritual leaders will insist that those they lead participate in a systematic study of Bible content, basic Christian doctrine, and the essentials of the Christian life along with a full integration of Pentecostal distinctives.

and attract participants. The goal becomes taking Bible study to the people rather than insisting they come to the church's educational facility. Bible study opportunities are offered at the church building to be sure, but they are not limited to that location.

The time of day that people gather for Bible study may vary. Early morning Bible studies are offered for people to participate in before they go to work. Evening Bible studies are offered for people who find that convenient. Sometimes a "power-lunch" approach is offered for business people. Early morning Bible studies for youth are often permitted on school property when they are organized and led by the young people in a local church. Bible study opportunities can be created and offered at any time that is convenient and attractive to those who attend.

The format of the class can be changed. Research reveals that most people do not attend Sunday school for Bible study; they attend for fellowship. An innovative approach that is winning wide support in effective churches is the Adult Bible Fellowship model. Utilizing this approach, a significant period of intentional fellowship precedes and sets the context for exciting Bible study. Other churches utilize a University of

Christian and political involvement), various life issues that need examination (family, marriage, parenting, aging, finances, health), doctrinal studies, and significant Christian books that are worthy of study. A study of each base of the We Build People discipleship process is available through Gospel Publishing House. Various leadership training studies are also valuable and popular. Radiant Life curriculum offers a wide variety of elective Bible study curriculum that can be utilized to capture interest and meet needs.

The name for Sunday school can change. What matters most is not the name that is used for Sunday school, but its essential ministry function within the life of the local church. In addition to the traditional title, Sunday school, other names have been used. School of the Bible, The Bible Study Hour, Discipleship Dynamics, Adult Bible Fellowship, and University of the Word are just a few of the possibilities. Using a creative name can sometimes provoke new interest and help establish a new identity for what Sunday school represents in the church.


What is needed today to involve as many people as possible in systematic Bible study is a full-menu approach, where in addition to its primary Sunday

- Who in our church cannot participate in Bible study during the Sunday school hour?

- When do we need to provide Bible study opportunities to meet various needs?

- What kinds of Bible study opportunities would capture people's interests and meet special needs?

- Where might Bible study be held and in what kind of context?

The pastor must function as the champion of this ministry within the local church. The pastor must insist that systematic Bible study within small group settings in the local church be given high priority in scheduling, facilities, personnel, and budget at every level. There is no reason for this essential ministry to struggle and languish in mediocrity. Untold opportunities exist for exciting creativity and anointed innovation. There is more than one way to do Sunday school. 

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Where They

It's 4 a.m. The sun will not be seen for a couple of hours, but Dan's already going strong. Shotgun in hand, he stands in ankle-deep water with hat pulled down tight to shield him from the icy winds. Dan's been waiting for this moment all week. Life never felt so good.

For Thomas and April, the workday starts early. Still, they find themselves laughing and telling favorite stories with their friends 'til well past midnight. Getting up will be a challenge, but there is no place they would rather be than nestled on this sofa amidst the laughter of their friends.

It is remarkable what people will put themselves through to be where they want to be. These real people, and others just like them, make sacrifices of comfort, time, and money so they can enjoy the elements of life they treasure. Most football fans will endure the bitter cold for a chance to be at the big game. Most people will gladly wear themselves out in exchange for a weekend of fun with friends.

So, why do some of these same people fail to give comparable energy to the discipleship opportunities provided by their church? Why is it that the insight and eternal benefit available in the Sunday school class fail to generate the same degree of self-sacrifice? Every pastor knows the litany of benefits each person can obtain in small-group settings. Why don't the beneficiaries want to benefit?

WHAT PEOPLE WANT

While an intensive review of the effectiveness of your Sunday school might reveal valuable information, deeper issues are likely at work. The teacher may lack certain qualities, or the material may have failed to grasp attention, but fixing such things tends to yield

only marginal results. Real answers can be found in discerning the difference between your discipleship efforts and the activities to which your people are vitally committed.

The key difference is often found in whose list of wants and needs is being met. Your discipleship efforts may be offering what you want people to receive, but they have proven faithful to those things they want. In short, your Sunday school may be offering what everyone with a degree in theology knows we all need, but it may not be scratching the real itch of people's hearts.

People want friends. They want answers to real-life issues. They want to live better than they are living. They want truth. They want to have fun. They want to be understood, and they are looking for a sense of purpose. And a few of them already understand that they need God. While they may see some benefit in greater knowledge of historical data or a deeper grasp of doctrinal concepts, they are looking for ways to add value to or even change their lives now.

MEETING PEOPLE'S NEEDS

Remarkably, ministries like Sunday school possess the potential to give people what they want. Those friends to get close to may be just a donut-reach away. The fun they are seeking may be as close as the next group event. Real-life answers are available if a teacher will mine them from God's Word. And truth?—the Word of God is overflowing with it.

Meeting the felt needs of students becomes the glue needed to hold them in the discipleship process. People who want friends will make great effort to be where their friends are. People looking for answers will prioritize the place where answers are offered. And if that

place is inside your church, you'll be amazed at how faithful they will suddenly become.

Unfortunately, many discipleship efforts fail to focus attention on these key areas. Believing that providing content is the only step in the preparation process, many pastors and teachers prepare a fabulous buffet of delectable insights, for only a handful of overfed diners. The real people we need to reach are absent again.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Why not look around your Sunday school for signs of real needs being met. Are your teachers giving time and opportunity to develop friendships? Are times of discussion and study bringing application, or just knowledge? Are students finding answers to their questions, or just answers to questions they really aren't asking? Are they being challenged to commit themselves to meaningful investments of their time and energy? Can they expect meaningful and effective direction for the many responsibilities of their lives, or do they walk away uncertain of the value of what they have learned? Answers to questions like these may well confront the struggling pastor or teacher with the true barrier that stands in the way of success.

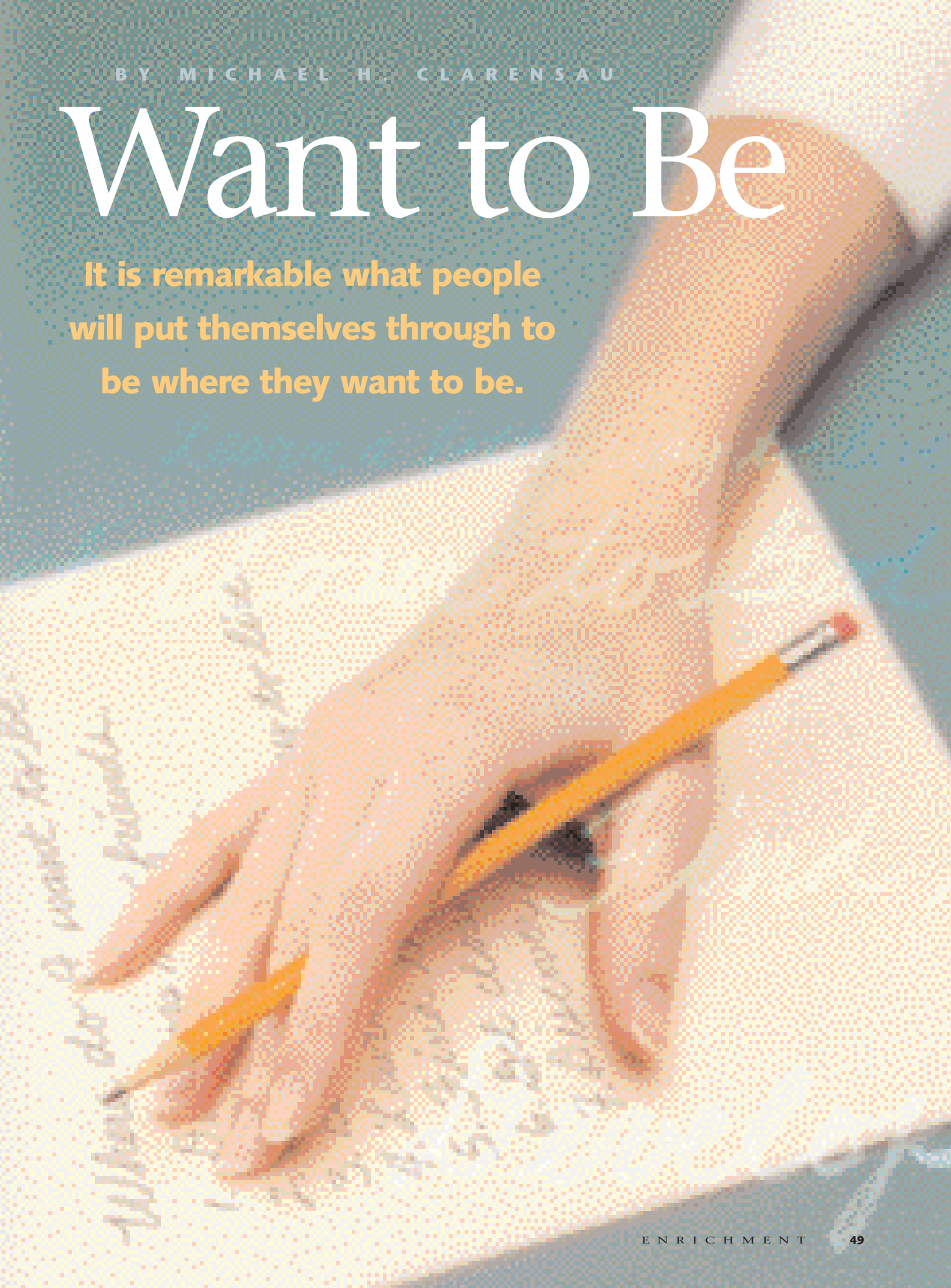
Students can't make friends in a class that is dominated by a lecturer. They won't find real answers if teaching methods don't allow for questions. They will never commit to better life choices today if they are only confronted with the nature of life in the first century. And they won't meet God if we never give time for responding to the truths we have discovered.

Growing Sunday schools are meeting the felt needs of their students. National surveys have revealed those

BY MICHAEL H. CLARENSAU

Want to Be


It is remarkable what people
will put themselves through to
be where they want to be.



needs as friendship, purpose, fun, understanding, answers, better living, truth, and a relationship with God. Take an honest inventory of your own efforts to see if you are hitting the right targets. You may find that while the potential has always been there, the focus has not. Once you have discovered what needs are waiting to be met, help teachers find ways to meet these needs. Add more time for fellowship, or interaction, or plan a

group getaway. Expect more relevance from your study, or give additional time to respond to what is already emerging.

In short, give them what they want. Your Sunday school or other small-group discipleship effort will enjoy committed participation when we provide the things people really want. Amazingly, the very nature of our efforts already possesses what people are looking for. But we must help them find it.

And when we do, they will be there. They may not stand shivering in ankle-deep water, or be glad to sit and talk for hours, but they will gladly endure a temperamental air conditioner or a few carpet stains if it means they can find what they are looking for. 

Michael H. Clarensau is senior pastor, Maranatha Worship Center (Assemblies of God), Wichita, Kansas.



GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

STRATEGIES FOR MEETING FELT NEEDS

Consider these options when trying to rebuild your Sunday school or other discipleship effort to provide what people are looking for:

THEY WANT FRIENDS.

- Find ways to get your students to talk to each other rather than just to you.
- Help students get better acquainted by using creative introductions. A "student of the week" segment would let you provide more detailed information.
- Have students work in groups to answer discussion questions.
- Share follow-up responsibilities. Let students call on those who are ill or absent.

THEY WANT A SENSE OF PURPOSE.

- Help every student find a place of ministry.
- Tackle a few meaningful group projects.
- Highlight successful ventures, or pray each week for a ministry of your church.
- Share the meaningful benefits your efforts of ministry have brought to your life.

THEY WANT TO HAVE FUN.

- Use a variety of methods.
- Keep your methods and your students moving. Nothing will bore a student faster than sitting still doing the same things repeatedly.
- Involve students in experiencing truth.
- Lighten up. Have fun yourself. If you are not having fun, your students won't either.

THEY WANT TO MEET GOD.

- Point your students to God as their answer.
- Give opportunities to receive from God or listen to Him.
- Include elements of worship, such as letting students speak sentences of thanksgiving to God.
- Share your own journey.

THEY WANT TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

- Understand and meet students' emotional needs.
- Use your students' gifts and abilities to enhance the class.
- Highlight your students. Share their hobbies or accomplishments.
- Take time to listen.

THEY WANT ANSWERS.

- Facilitate student discovery. Help them find answers rather than trying to always provide them yourself.
- Encourage interaction.
- Don't be afraid of tough questions. Find the answers together. Even a good debate will attract students because they realize we are searching for real answers.
- Insist on relevance.
- Be aware of real issues your students are encountering in life.

THEY WANT TO LEARN A BETTER WAY TO LIVE.

- Make forgiveness and repentance normal. Finding God's way to live is a process of recognizing failure and turning to God's direction.
- Help students find healthy relationships. Many Christians need to evaluate the key influences in their lives and adjust them.
- Give homework. When you discover ways to live, assign your students the task of implementing those discoveries.

THEY WANT TRUTH.

- Use your Bible every week. Get students in the habit of turning to the Bible for the answers they seek.
- Insist on biblical interaction. Establish a foundation that affirms God's Word as your source of truth.
- Discuss secular ideas of truth honestly. Don't be afraid to revisit why we believe what we believe.
- Focus on principles rather than cultural expressions.
- Acknowledge your limits. If you don't know the answer, admit it. Help your students learn to discover truth rather than merely listening to it.

—Michael H. Clarensau, Wichita, Kansas



Disciplin Postmode



aking in a ern World

The postmodern is biblically illiterate, skeptical, unconvinced that truth exists in absolute terms, and personally adrift, but it is possible to reach and disciple these new kinds of people.

B Y E A R L C R E P S

If the thought of a kid with green hair and tattoos occupying the front row of your church is unsettling, you are not alone. This person represents more than just the latest in body piercing. He or she is a symbol of an emerging culture that requires the church to rethink how disciples will be made in the 21st century.

After a year of field research on cultural trends and the churches that are responding to them, I have reached some preliminary conclusions. There is reason for concern, but even greater reason for hope. It is possible to reach and disciple these new kinds of people. In fact, they make marvelous Christians when given the opportunity.

My argument is simple: real discipling today is a missionary enterprise, and every effective missionary operates on the principle of *contextualization*.

ways that theologian Tyron Inbody calls it “intellectual Velcro dragged across culture” that “can be used to characterize almost anything one approves or disapproves.” Even some of its staunchest advocates resist attempts to define the philosophy on which their own careers are based.

Being unable to define a concept, however, does not mean it has no effect on our lives. Scientists cannot explain gravity, but its invisible force does keep us glued to this planet. Similarly, postmodern philosophy has an unseen effect over millions of people who have never heard the word.

Many in ministry sense that something powerful is shifting in our culture, but have trouble identifying it specifically. What was once confined to coffee houses and university literature classes

versal idea that there are absolute truths that can be known. In fact, these assumptions have been so controlling in the Western world for the last three centuries that we are largely unaware they are operating. They seem so natural and obvious most of us have felt little need to examine them. Moreover, many of these concepts became foundational to evangelical Christianity with its insistence on strong moral values and its systematic approach to understanding Scripture. Ironically, the same type of thinking has also funded secular, scientific skepticism about the supernatural.

These foundations have now been excavated and are being demolished by several forces. Literary criticism has fostered skepticism about the motives behind any form of communication.

Postmodernism is a reaction against the values of the modern world as shaped by the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment.

Specifically, we are called to make disciples in a world increasingly influenced by *postmodernism*. If that sounds daunting, don't worry. Everyone feels that way. Len Sweet describes this challenge: “All leaders are now anthropologists. The dying Industrial Age paradigm is being replaced by a new culture that requires the fieldwork skills of an anthropologist, the dedication of a missionary, the patience of a saint, the learning curve of a child, the cunning of a thief, the stamina of an athlete, and the resolve of a coast guard sailor.”

The good news is that all of us are learning together on this issue, so there is no shame in being new to it. There are also no experts, only fellow learners. The bad news is that postmodernism can be hard to define. But the effort is well worth it.

DEFINING POSTMODERNISM

The term *postmodern* is used in so many

has found its way into the mainstream. If you sense this, you have taken the first step toward developing disciples among the new kind of people we are serving.

The modern person

Postmodernism is a reaction against the values of the modern world as shaped by the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. The modern worldview is characterized (in the West) by several key traits:

- The centrality of the individual
- The reliability of human perception
- The primacy of reason
- The objectivity of truth
- The inevitability of progress
- The certainty of absolutes
- The uncertainty of the supernatural
- The uniformity of worldview

This orderly sense of the world as a predictable mechanism brought with it the scientific method, the industrial and information ages, and the now-contro-

History has deflated our confidence in endless progress by making the 20th century the bloodiest ever. Debate within the scientific community has called the reliability of their investigations into question. Technology has confronted us with instruments of mass destruction. Corporate life is becoming increasingly soul destroying. Artists of every sort have abandoned traditional ways of thinking about their craft in favor of highly personalized work. Travel and immigration have shown us there are many ways to see the world and many different ways people view truth.

Meanwhile, the church has mostly stood on the sidelines either ignoring the transition or condemning those participating in it. These responses are simply not an option for any ministry that is going to make disciples today. This new kind of person must be engaged, won, and grown.

The modern world is not gone. It is more accurate to say that modernity and postmodernity have collided and are now struggling for dominance. There is little question that modernity is losing, but it is not clear that postmodernism will become the sort of philosophy that capitalism or democracy is. In fact, postmodernism may be not much more than the label attached to the current period of transition—a naming of our anxieties. The actual replacement for modernism may be something else. In any event, modernist people and institutions will be with us for at least our lifetime, while postmodernism will likely continue its campaign of attrition.

The postmodern person

The struggle between the two forces can be seen clearly in the many opinion surveys conducted on the values of Americans. While this research finds sizeable majorities no longer committed to absolute truth in general, more specific questions reveal that most Americans believe in God, trust the Bible, and pray frequently. Recent research by George Barna finds that we tend to shape our values pragmatically—bending our choices more toward what accomplishes our goals rather than adhering to some abstract religious code. We live in a culture, then, that is struggling to reconcile a deep personal hunger for reality with an equally profound skepticism over whether such reality can ever be found. If science has brought us anthrax, if politicians have brought us scandal, and if religion has brought us bigotry, where do we turn?—to postmodernity.

We can think of the postmodern person (postmodernism is the philosophy, postmodernity is the cultural landscape influenced by it) as tending to have a mix of traits in various combinations. While this person would likely be North American, the influence of this mindset is spreading rapidly around the globe, due to the training received in the North American and Western European universities in which postmodernism is almost an article of faith.

The average person influenced by postmodernism may never have heard a lecture or read a book about it. Nonetheless, the traits that embody the philosophy are all around us:

- The centrality of community
- The primacy of experience
- The subjectivity of truth
- The complexity of human perception
- The fragility of progress
- The unreality of absolutes
- The enormity of the spiritual
- The plurality of worldviews

The sunny, straightforward, things-are-as-they-seem world of modernism is being submerged in a darker, more complex perspective that is bringing a different kind of person through the doors of our churches. This person is biblically illiterate, skeptical, unconvinced that truth exists in absolute terms, and personally adrift.

It is doubtful that conventional teaching methods will form this new sort of “raw material” into a devoted follower of Jesus. Futurist Tom Sine puts it bluntly: “Typically, the young watch at least 20 hours of TV a week, plus spend a huge amount of time with CDs, video games, and the Internet. It is a joke to believe that an hour of Sunday school a week will have much influence against this . . . onslaught. We will need to create

much more serious approaches to Christian nurture that involve families and communities.”

The day is over when we can rely on a fairly conservative society, and a church experience being in almost everyone’s background, to do much of the work for us. Now we have to actually *do* Christianity if anything of substance is to result.

DISCIPLING POSTMODERNS

The spiritual formation of postmodern people will require the efforts of the entire church rather than being delegated to a department or program. Making disciples (rather than running programs) will have to become what the church *does*, the core reason for its existence. Only a commitment of this magnitude will see the congregation through the steep learning curve and inevitable failures that will be negotiated along the way. In other words, this is about more than adding videos or PowerPoint slides to Bible teaching. It is about the core of our mission. Discipling postmoderns will involve several assets, all of which are available to anyone who loves people.

Authenticity: Get up close

Postmoderns are skeptical of institutions and suspicious of anyone who appears to be advocating a monolithic

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“I’m opposed to a scout troop using our church for its meeting. Why, some of them don’t even come from Christian homes! Do we really want unsaved urchins in our church?”

or exclusive view of the truth. This is a dilemma for Christians who believe Jesus is the *only* way to the Father. However, because postmoderns are highly pragmatic and deeply spiritual (without being religious), they are open to any message that is working in the lives of their peers. As a consequence, there will be no substitute for a lived-out faith in the 21st century.

This is more than an issue of personal holiness. It also concerns the need to be honest and forthright. We do *not* have all the answers. We *are* weak. We *do* fail. While a traditional, modern audience might be aghast at these admissions (After all, aren't you the teacher because you're better than we are?), postmoderns will regard the absence of brutal honesty as an indication that you are not real. They want the same level of honesty in the message itself. But if the messenger is not authentic, the message will have little effect, no matter how direct.

A disciplemaker, then, must be an authentic, flesh-and-blood person who is willing to expose his or her life to observation. Clearly there is an enormous opportunity here for one-on-one and small-group mentoring. Especially exciting is that forming these bonds can (and often must) begin long before conversion. Postmoderns find faith through authenticity and grow in faith the same way.

Community: Get together

While modernism exalted the individual as the knower of truth, postmoderns are more likely to depend on those around them for a frame of reference. This "tribal" view of life has important implications for the structure of disciplemaking. The notion of rows of chairs filled with attentive listeners with a specialist lecturing from the front is fading fast. Rightfully so. This vision of Christian education tends to be not much more than a baptized version of the public school system. While strong Bible teaching should always be a mainstay of congregational life, the context for learning will need modification for postmodern audiences.

Postmoderns discover truth most effectively in highly interactive group settings in which there are real relationships. Disciplemaking will need to be structured so fellowship is a central aspect of the experience. While there is no one-size-fits-all prescription here, the principle remains that learning for this new person is an act of shared discovery lived out in a close network of relationships. In other words, we will make disciples among postmoderns by *being* the church rather than trying to *do* church. Unless all of the pieces are present, none of them will function. This holistic sense of how disciples are made requires a whole community.

Experience: Get to the point

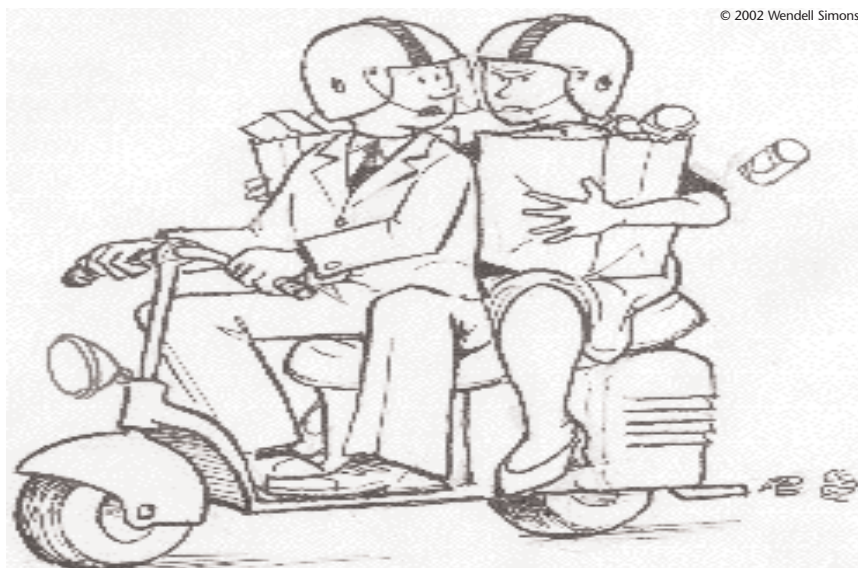
Modern audiences often find a great teaching outline to be satisfying in an almost aesthetic sense—"great lesson" often means "great analysis." The new tribe entering our churches is unimpressed with this, hungering for something more. Robert Webber notes the change this will bring to our educational efforts: "In the postmodern world, education will shift from the passing on of information to the passing down of wisdom through experience of Christian truth, which was regarded as propositional, intellectual, rational, and will be experienced as embodied reality. Faith will be communicated through immersion into a community of people who will live the Christian faith." This new audience wants (and needs) to experience God in the discovery of truth and in the outworking of that truth in the world.

In fact, postmoderns will be much more reluctant to recognize a distinction between *knowing* the truth and *living* it. If the latter does not happen, the former has no meaning to them. They are interested in meeting Jesus and being conformed to His image rather than being receptors of ideas *about* Jesus.

Postmoderns will not be able to grasp a concept like hospitality without smelling chocolate chip cookies in your kitchen. They will not know what true worship is until they feel what Isaiah felt in the temple. They will not grasp healing until the sick are made well. They will not understand Pentecost apart from being filled with the Spirit themselves. And the Great Commission will mean little to them until they are missionaries in their own culture. Disciplemakers can no longer think of what they do as conveying content, with application left to the individual or to some other department of the church. It is all or nothing.

Acceptance: Get over it

Leaders tend to have unspoken expectations for the spiritual growth of those they serve. When these expectations are



"I know, dear, but it was this or our housing allowance."

CAN SUNDAY SCHOOL REACH/TEACH A POSTMODERN CULTURE?

Does Sunday school fit the postmodern mindset? Can it minister to those who believe in nothing on one hand and in anything on the other?

If we are to go into our culture to make disciples, we need to make sure our ministries fit those we want to reach. How can we know if Sunday school will be effective? The answer is: It depends.

IT DEPENDS ON OUR WILLINGNESS TO BE AUTHENTIC.

Those who follow postmodernism, respect and look for authenticity. Postmodern advocates will listen if pastors, leaders, and Sunday school teachers are willing to share themselves and their Godward journey. Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection . . . Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 3:10,12, NIV, *emphases mine*). John Maxwell might call this failing forward.

IT DEPENDS ON OUR WILLINGNESS TO INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS.

Most of us feel time pressure. We often have more on our to-do list than we have time, energy, or resources to complete. People in a postmodern culture do not respect to-do lists. They are searching for genuine, loving, unconditional relationships. Teachers who want to reach a postmodern generation must be willing to make time for relationship building. Take time to chat with students by phone, E-mail, or over a cup of latte. Slow down for time together outside of class. Set aside time in class for catching up, rejoicing with the happy, or consoling the sad. Jesus always taught relationally.

In Romans 12:1, Paul described a “spiritual way for you to worship” (New Century Version) as serving others, teaching others, encouraging others, giving to others, showing kindness, and other Christlike interactions (Romans 12:7–21). This teaching/modeling/mentoring extends beyond the Sunday school hour and becomes effective because of the authentic teaching style used during the weekly Bible studies.

IT DEPENDS ON OUR WILLINGNESS TO MOVE FROM KNOWING TO DOING.

Those in a postmodern culture are looking for proof in our actions. Are we willing to go beyond preparing for “works of service” (Ephesians 4:12) by doing ministry as a class and as individuals? Those outside the church are watching to see if we inside the church are willing to emerge from our classes to joyfully invest ourselves in helping others. Jesus is watching too. On Judgment Day He will reward those who have fed the hungry and visited the sick and imprisoned. Those who have tutored immigrants, coached children, and mentored youth will receive their rewards also. Classes that plan and prepare ministry projects will reach those in a postmodern generation.

IT DEPENDS ON OUR WILLINGNESS TO PRAY AND TO PERSIST.

Those who pursue postmodern concepts don’t trust institutions. Some view the church as an institution and Sunday school as an institutional program. But Christ has promised that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. That is why He commissioned us to make disciples until He returns. Prayer aligns us with Christ’s plans and power for ministry from the Holy Spirit. God promises, “The Words I say . . . will not return to me empty. They make the things happen that I want to happen. They succeed in doing what I send them to do” (Isaiah 55:11, New Century Version). As teachers persist in helping students study God’s Word each week, they can be confident that God will use His Word to change lives—even in a postmodern culture.

Can Sunday school reach/teach a postmodern culture? It depends on pastors, leaders, and teachers. Are we willing to do whatever it will take to reach them? Are we willing to raise our expectations of what happens in our Sunday school? If so, we are following the heart of God, and He will bring the increase.

—Sharon Ellard, Sunday school promotions coordinator, Springfield, Missouri

not met, the result can be discipline or disparagement. While these pressures toward spiritual success may have worked at one time, they are unrealistic and even counterproductive for postmoderns.

For one thing, these newcomers have spiritual starting points much farther away than did previous generations,

with most having no Christian memories whatsoever. Timelines for spiritual growth should be abandoned or extended. Remember, you are now a missionary in an alien culture, and this is a completely new kind of person.

Ironically, there are ways in which we can expect more from this person as well. Postmoderns who find Christ

will never be satisfied with a Christianity that is composed of church attendance, tithing, and avoiding felony-level sin. They want radical commitment to a radical gospel. But this takes time and patience.

Acceptance that promotes growth does not mean compromise. It means the opposite. Standards should be

RESOURCES

BOOKS

If I could only read three books on postmodernism, they would be:

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. This short book is still the gold standard. An insightful and mercifully brief overview of postmodernism with some implications for ministry.

McLaren, Brian. *The Church on the Other Side*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. Brian transitioned his church for the postmodern world. A thoughtful work with a couple of clear chapters on postmodernity and the importance of radical discontinuity. You'll probably disagree with some of his comments on revivalist Christianity.

Hunter, George. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000. This book is on my all-time top 10 list. A marvelous combination of church history, missionary theology, and practical application. A powerful synthesis that clarifies many of the issues.

EMERGING CULTURE/EMERGING CHURCH

Emerging Culture/Emerging Church is my select listing of around 1,000 resources on this theme. It includes books, journals, and a large section of annotated Web sites. The list can be used online, or downloaded free as a PDF file. You will find it at: http://agts.edu/faculty/faculty_publications/bibliographies/creps_bibliography/index.html.

CHURCH

For an outstanding example of an Assemblies of God church that is effectively reaching postmoderns, check out Capital Christian Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. Only 4 years old, this church plant has grown to over 400 in attendance on Sunday. You will find them on the Web at: <http://www.setfree.com>.

high—but for the right things. An atmosphere of openness must prevail, even when it elicits hard questions and harder issues. Postmoderns will respond more to the fact they are free to speak than to the authority of someone who pretends to have all the answers. Thus, the way for postmoderns to grow into what they can be is to be accepted where they are.

THE LEARNING CURVE

What I have stated so far may sound intriguing. But if you serve in a ministry built on modernist assumptions (as most of us do), knowing how to respond can be a challenge. Here are some things you can begin doing as soon as you lay down this journal.

Check it out

This thing really is happening—really. It's not going away. The time to start reading is now. (See the list of books in the Resources sidebar on this page.) This

effort will equip you to understand for yourself and to train others. Chances are some of your leaders already sense that things are changing, but may lack the vocabulary to discuss the issues. Becoming the chief interpreter of these trends for your ministry makes you the leader, preparing for the day when that credibility may be necessary to lead your group in transition.

Talk it out

Remember, there are no experts. Find others with similar interests and begin a dialog with them, perhaps meeting once a month to discuss a book like *Primer on Postmoderism* by Stanley Grenz. Many opportunities exist on the Internet for this sort of discussion. (See the discussion groups in the Web-based resources section of my Emerging Culture/Emerging Church resource list.) Group discussion will catalyze your thinking, making it possible to wrestle through things

much more quickly than you could ever do on your own.

Work it out

There is no substitute for experience. Take a field trip to a congregation that is discipling postmoderns. (See the "Church" section of my resource list.) If travel is not possible, a telephone interview is an excellent substitute. In my field research, I have found leaders of these groups to be very cooperative and gracious. You will quickly discover there are no universally applicable formulas.

Try it out

Reaching postmoderns requires a learning curve—implying that climbing involves effort and risk. With an appropriate level of internal consensus among your leadership, don't be afraid to try new ideas. Read the next sentence three times: There are no fixed answers guaranteed to work in every situation. The Spirit who forms disciples will give you a way to touch postmoderns that is appropriate to your situation. Generally, this is best accomplished by adding to your ministry, rather than by altering a current format that has spiritual and emotional currency among your modernists.

Some commentators feel that postmodernism is a dagger aimed at the heart of the church. They are wrong. The clash with modernity is creating one of the greatest missionary opportunities ever. This season requires an all-or-nothing kind of Christianity, a practical faith filled with the power of God and the love of God's people. If we cannot supply this, we have no right to be called "the Church." By the power of God's Spirit we can be this. We must. 🍌

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BY CLANCY P. HAYES

TRAINING: The Secret of Pastoral Success



What is the difference between a successful, growing church and one that is not? There may be no single answer to this question, but there is no denying that a common component of successful churches is their pastors have recognized the importance of lay ministers in the church and seek to equip them to fulfill their calling. Lyle Schaller notes, "In general, the stronger the role of the laity, the greater the institutional strength of the congregation. The greater the reliance on the minister as the central organizing force, the more vulnerable the congregation."¹

While most pastors recognize the importance of lay ministers in the church, many of these same pastors spend little effort developing those who teach Sunday school or become involved in other ministries of the church.

One contributing factor that determines how pastors use the human resources available in the local church is their style of leadership. According to Marlene Wilson, "If you are a boss, expert, or doer, you probably will share little of your work or yourself. If you are an enabler, this function of directing and leading becomes your primary focus. Your goal becomes finding out how you can help others succeed in what you have delegated to them. If you are not sure of what they need from you, you ask."²

The first step in becoming an enabler of ministry is to embrace the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. Pastors must believe that those who work in the church as laypeople are no less "ministers" than the person who proclaims the Word of God from the pulpit each week. Mel Ming reinforces this principle when he states, "The church's educational ministry is done by God-called and gifted people who are given to the church (Ephesians 4:11). A person is not in a ministry position by chance or accident. Nor should one be in a ministry position because he or she could not say no, or even only because of their natural abilities. The only reason for being in a ministry position is that the divine, sovereign, omnipotent God

called and placed one in that position (1 Corinthians 12:18)."³

Pastors who see each individual in the church as a potential functioning minister are compelled to develop ways of helping people reach their potential in the kingdom of God. Although the ways may vary from church to church, the common element for effective lay ministry is training.

THE VALUE OF TRAINING

Noted author and pastor, Bill Hull, sees a lack of training in the church as hypocritical to what we preach about the kingdom of God. He states, "Without training, Christians experience nothing but frustration. The most effective way to abort the future of eager believers is to inspire them without training them. Tell them they are priests of God, gifted ministers of the gospel, then don't show them how to make it happen."⁴

Pastor John Palmer adds, "Our churches can be very organized, but if we do not train and equip people to do the ministries God has called them to, we will find them going in and out of ministry doors on a regular basis and never really being effective and fulfilled in any ministry."⁵

There is little doubt that training and equipping believers for ministry is a primary responsibility for the pastor (Ephesians 4:11-16). The question many pastors face is how to effectively train Sunday school teachers and others who serve in the Christian education ministries of the local church.

THE VENUE FOR TRAINING

In *A Theology of Personal Ministry*, Lawrence O. Richards and Gib Martin make a compelling argument for using a team approach to training people to do ministry. Richards and Martin observe, "In the New Testament we see a strong emphasis on team ministries. While the names of Paul and Peter seem to tower over those of others, they did not move out alone in their ministries. Typically they moved from place to

place and ministered in small groups or teams. Usually there was a stable core of mature believers (such as Silas and Barnabas) associated with a person like Paul, and also younger apprentices (like Timothy and Titus)."⁶

Jesus was a master at this type of apprentice training. He selected 12 apprentices with the goal of transmitting His values, skills, and purposes so they could extend His ministry (John 14:12).

The value of training in teams is that those being trained are not thrown headlong into their ministry task and expected to carry the burden alone. "The strength of apprentice training depends on the ability of the mentor-leader who must first be a good model, be able to assess and challenge the trainees growth, then be able to teach at teachable moments."⁷ When you allow apprentices to be teamed with a skilled teacher, the person being trained can be brought along at his or her own pace.

For years skilled laborers have seen the value of hands-on apprentice training. Apprentice training is also an ideal way to train church workers in real-time and real-life situations.

THE VIEW OF TRAINING

Before starting the process of training, you must determine what you want to accomplish through your training program. Kenn Gangel suggests that three specific elements form the foundation of an effective training program: motivation, standards, and evaluation.⁸ As a leader you have the job of reinforcing the importance of one's ministry, to determine the level of excellence expected in ministries of the church you lead, and then to offer ongoing, helpful, and corrective instruction to those in training.

The training ministry of Jesus provides a means to lay this foundation. Bill Hull observes that "Jesus modeled a six-step teaching method: 'tell them what,' 'tell them why,' 'show them how,' 'do it with them,' 'let them do it,' 'deploy them.'"⁹

PASTORS/MENTORS WANTED: LEADING TEACHERS FROM FAITHFUL TO EFFECTIVE

Each week countless volunteers teach students in Sunday school. During the rest of the week, these teachers are plumbers, nurses, postal workers, business owners, and waitresses. On Sundays they open God's Word and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). Can volunteers become effective disciplers?

Smith Wigglesworth was a plumber who became an effective minister after being filled with the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, Jesus chose fishermen, tax collectors, and tentmakers. He didn't just hand them a quarterly and show them a classroom. Jesus cast a vision for the difference His disciples could make in their world. He modeled good teaching and answered their questions. He gave them opportunities to minister. He empowered them with the Holy Spirit.

Today, Sunday school is taught by the same kinds of people Jesus commissioned. Some Sunday school teachers are already highly effective disciplers. Others, while faithful, could become much more effective. If we can mentor these volunteers for ministry, their ministry impact can be multiplied.

How can a pastor train (or retrain) faithful teachers to become life-changing disciplers?

CLARIFY THE MISSION OF TEACHING SUNDAY SCHOOL.

The Sunday school's mission is not just to complete every lesson every week, or just to fill students' heads with biblical information. The goal of Sunday school is to radically change students' lives. All disciples are called to become fully devoted followers of Christ. Sunday school gets God's people into God's Word so God's Word can get into God's people, transforming them from the inside out. A pastor who is committed to life-change discipleship can clarify that mission for Sunday school.

CAST A COORDINATED VISION.

The Sunday school's vision should coordinate with the overall vision of the church. Pastors who have a vision concerning God's plan for a church and community will benefit by communicating that vision to teachers and leaders. Help these volunteers understand how Sunday school can contribute to the overall spiritual health of the church.

LEAD EVALUATION AND SELF-EVALUATION.

Pastors can help teachers and leaders evaluate the effectiveness

of Sunday school in presenting biblical information and principles in a context that brings life change and ministry. If becoming Christlike is the goal, how are we doing? How many junior boys are turning the other cheek? How many high school girls are volunteering to tutor kids? How many businessmen are feeding the poor? How many senior adults are volunteering for ministry? How many unsaved parents are becoming believers? How many students are being filled with the Holy Spirit? How often do students exit their classrooms to minister in the community?

BECOME A MODEL WHO MENTORS AND EMPOWERS TEACHERS.

Would you like to see the Sunday school in your church go to the next level of effective ministry? Prayerfully consider how you can lead in that process. Spend time with teachers. This communicates their significance in the ministry of the church. Meet with teachers at least once a quarter. At the meetings model the style of teaching you would like them to use with their students. Do you want them to be student centered? Use interactive learning to communicate your vision. Give teachers ownership. Allow them to decide how to raise the quality of the Sunday school. Let them set long-term discipleship and evangelism goals they can use in evaluating their effectiveness. These goals should be specific enough so teachers will know when they have been achieved. Lead the meetings as a facilitator who outlines objectives, answers questions, and divides teachers by the age levels they teach so they can develop age-appropriate strategies for reaching ministry goals. At the end of each meeting, both you and the teachers should know you have made progress toward taking Sunday school to the next level of effectiveness.

Sunday school has the potential to transform lives. It has the capacity to mobilize believers for ministry. Sunday school can help churches include all who come into the family of God. It can prepare believers to go find others who need to know Christ. But highly effective Sunday schools don't just happen. According to Ephesians 4, teachers are prepared by church leaders who train others for works of service. As a pastor, you are the key to raising the impact of Sunday school on the current and future members of your church.

—Sharon Ellard, Sunday school promotions coordinator,
Springfield, Missouri

John Palmer offers a similar training approach based on the ministry of Jesus. This five-fold process entails "association" (being with those we train), "impartation" (sharing the how-to's), "demonstration" (showing how it is done), "delegation" (ministry practicum), and "supervision" (offering

helpful suggestions).¹⁰

VEHICLES FOR TRAINING

In addition to the personal one-on-one apprenticeship training every believer should have, there are a variety of other types of training in which you will want your lay ministers to be involved.

Here are just a few training vehicles of which you should take advantage.

District Training Events

These annual training events are usually comprised of workshops that focus on developing specific skills, techniques, or awareness. District directors enlist

qualified trainers from the national and local scene to address key elements that will make those who attend more effective in their service to the church. There is usually a cost involved for those who attend these events, but it is a minimal investment considering the potential benefit for those who attend and for the local church.

Staff Training Courses

Training courses generally are conducted over a period of time and require regular commitment and participation. They tend to focus on communication of information, but should include experience opportunities.

Each year the national Sunday school office releases a staff-training course that will help you focus your training activities. If your Sunday school staff completes a staff training book each year, your teachers will be better prepared to carry out the task to which they have been called.

In addition to the staff-training book, the national Sunday school office administers the All Church Training Series. This program allows pastors to get all their workers unified regarding the functions and beliefs of their church and provides a way to train people for specific ministry tasks.

Conferences or Retreats

Conference or retreat experiences organized by the local church can be ideal settings for team building, inspiration, and motivation.

Monthly Teacher Training Sessions

Monthly teacher training meetings provide a regular opportunity for leadership to instill vision, pastoral care, and skill building. Mel Ming suggests using the V.H.S. approach to these training sessions.

V - Vision Casting. This is a time to focus attention on the why of ministry. It includes motivation and inspiration by clarifying the vision. Leaders who are fulfilling the vision are affirmed. All are encouraged to reach out for new participants and to develop those already attending their classes and groups.

H - Huddle. This is the time for ministry coordination and pastoral care of leaders. The leaders constitute a ministry team. Plans and logistical needs are addressed. Time is provided for leaders to pray together and share their needs.

S - Skill Development. Every session should include training in one specific skill for leadership ministry. This is not the time to give a superficial overview, but

a specific skill that can be implemented that week in ministry.¹¹

THE REWARDS OF TRAINING

Marlene Wilson summarizes the rewards of training well. "As we begin to help more and more of our lay ministers not only to discover but to actualize their gifts, I have no doubt whatsoever that the internal needs of the church will be met much more effectively."¹²

Although the initial investment in training may seem to be great, the long-term benefits of reduced recruiting and an increased number of collaborators in the ministry make the investment worthwhile. ☺

Clancy P. Hayes is training coordinator, Sunday School Field Ministries, Springfield, Missouri.

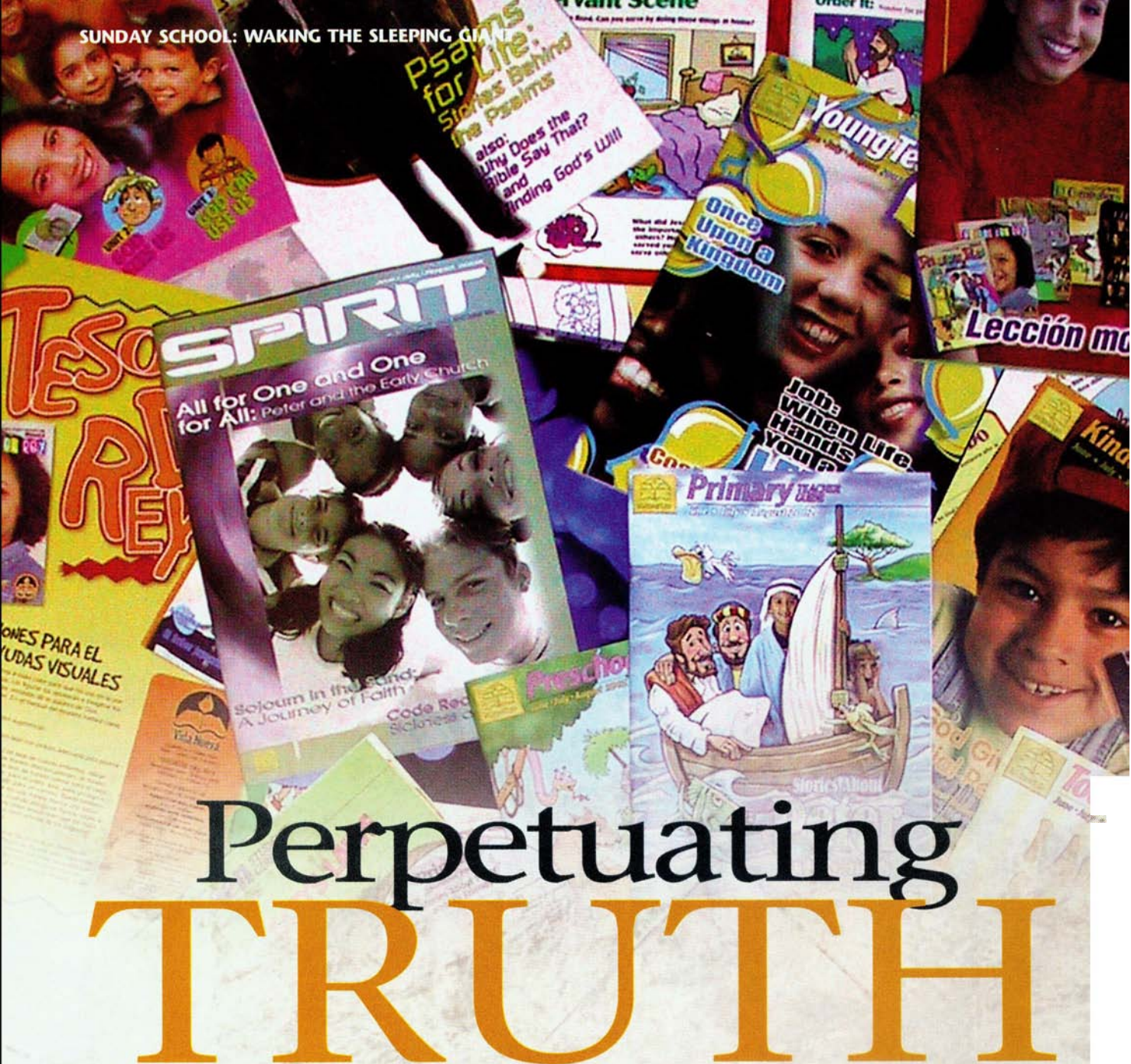


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"Being asked to make such a weighty decision, the board decides to sleep on it."



Perpetuating TRUTH

THE MINISTRY OF SUNDAY SCHOOL RESOURCES

B Y J O H N T M A E M P A

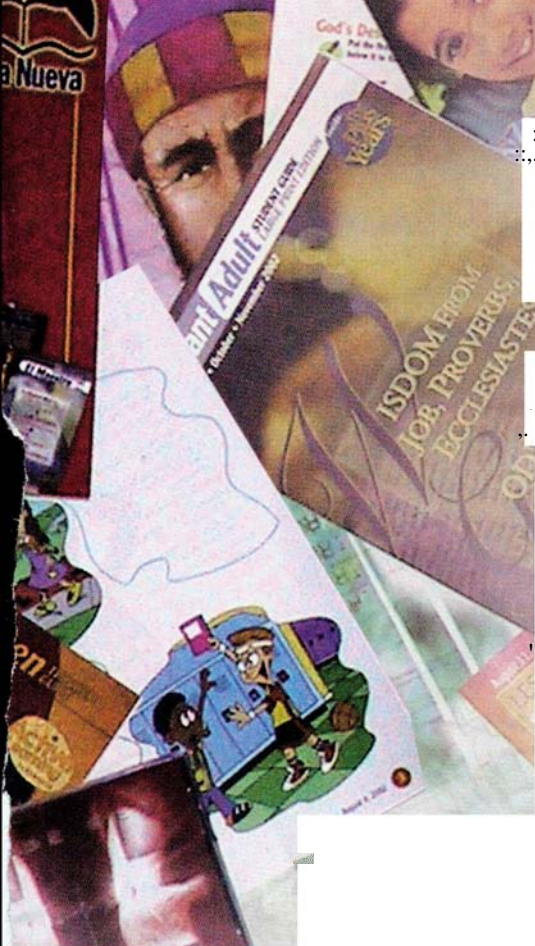
On any given Sunday morning across the U.S., nearly 1 million men, women, youth, and children gather in Assemblies of God Sunday school classrooms. While the number is encouraging, even impressive, the count alone is not an indicator of effective Christian education. What happens in the classroom—the teaching/learning process, the perpetuating of biblical and doctrinal

truth—is of far greater consequence, and all the more so as we move closer to the end of this age. The intentional, systematic study of God's Word and its application to life are nonnegotiable disciplines for the local church.

THE CASE FOR SOUND TEACHING

In both letters to his young associate in ministry, Paul urged Timothy to be wary

of false teachers, to avoid getting caught up in meaningless debates and endless arguments. He warned "that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1,2*). Timothy was urged to focus on the essentials, to



wrong, good and beautiful. Our choices are reshaped by our worldview The basis for the Christian worldview, of course, is God's revelation in Scripture." Yet, Colson stresses further that it is not enough to know what Scripture teaches and to go through the motions of Christian living. Instead, all believers must understand that Christianity is ultimate reality—that our relationship with Christ must affect all we do, say, and think.

While important matters of Christian living are conveyed from the pulpit, much of the line upon line and precept upon precept is laid within the text of the Christian education program of the local church. There, truth, theology, doctrine, and their life application are measured out to students in accord with their stages of development and levels of understanding. In an environment conducive to inquiry and reflection, students are helped to understand that God's revelation touches all areas of life, they are responsible for more than knowing and feeling, and they must act on what they know and feel.

Vital to the success of transmitting truth to life are biblically sound, compelling resources that meaningfully

engage students physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in the teaching-learning-applying process. Providing those materials has been a long-standing mission of our Fellowship, and one that continues to this day.

A HISTORIC MANDATE

Prior to the formation of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1914, a special call was issued through the *Pentecostal Evangel's* forerunner, *Word and Witness*. Pentecostal leaders were summoned "to promote . . . fellowship and cooperation among Pentecostal believers, to devise a means of spreading the gospel more effectively, to consider the needs of the fellowship for schools, and to advance the publishing interests." Our early leaders understood well the need to proclaim and preserve sound biblical teaching and Pentecostal distinctives through printed materials.

Though publishing was primitive by today's standards, tireless effort soon was under way to provide lesson leaflets and story papers that would help Pentecostal believers, young and old, understand the gospel and the importance of Spirit-filled living.

REAPING 10 YEARS OF USING BRAND X CURRICULUM SELECTION INSIGHTS FROM A FORMER PASTORATE

As I reviewed applications for church membership, I was happy to see that a number of our young people wanted to join the church. But I became concerned as I noticed each had responded no to the question, "Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?" Their explanations were also identical; they didn't understand what it was about.

Nearly all of them had been raised in the church and had attended Sunday school for the last 10 years. *So why don't they understand one of our major doctrines?* I wondered.

Then I remembered. Ten years before, some teachers in our younger classes wanted to switch to a different curriculum. Their reasons seemed justified. The other materials were well-written and had many good qualities. So we switched to Brand X. I assumed they would work in our doctrines at appropriate times.

Ten years later, the bottom line told the sad story—it didn't work. Brand X failed us, not because of what it said, but because of what it didn't say. And we reaped the results.

Some materials on the market offer terrific features, but remember, the terrific can never replace the important.

—Lorry Thomas is executive pastor of Abundant Life Assembly of God, Grapevine, Texas.

"command and teach" the principles of salvation (see verses 9-11) and to "devote [himself] to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (verse 13). Paul further admonished Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (verse 16).

Paul knew that Timothy was convinced of the truth because he had heard it taught from infancy from those whom he knew and trusted (see 2 Timothy 3:14,15). From them he had learned that Scripture is "God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (verse 16).

Teaching, applying, and modeling eternal truth are vital to helping students of all ages grasp, internalize, and live the Christian life. In his book, *How Now Shall We Live?*, Charles Colson writes, "Our choices are shaped by what we believe is real and true, right and

Today at the Gospel Publishing House, curricular materials are processed through sophisticated electronic editing and imaging equipment and a state-of-the-art press. Yet, the mandate is unchanged—to provide biblically sound materials that guide both teachers and students in a thorough and life-changing understanding of God's Word.

THE QUEST FOR CURRICULUM

Not long ago a pastor sent an E-mail with a two-part question: "Why should I use a printed curriculum?" and, "With so many curriculums available, why should I use Radiant Life?"

Valid questions.

Clearly, there are gifted teachers who can teach extemporaneously from an open Bible. Through years of study and experience, they have obtained a thorough knowledge of Bible content and have gathered compelling illustrations and anecdotes and other resources that make the passages come alive. Others create their own curriculum, writing lessons, life applications, and even developing supplementary resources that dynamically engage students in the learning process.

While both are commendable, some

the tendency to stay with the favorite and the familiar, the lack of balance in themes and issues presented, and the sheer amount of time required to prepare meaningful lesson materials week after week.


During part of my college years, I taught a class of junior high boys. Considering myself an innovative teacher and knowledgeable in a number of areas, I decided to depart from the supplied curriculum and present something else "of interest" to the boys. Presenting two or three options, I asked them to choose. The next day, standing among the massive stacks in the college library, I quickly realized the ominous task I had just given myself. Amid my already harried schedule, I would now have to spend hours researching and developing from scratch a series of lessons on the topic of choice. What had seemed like a great idea quickly dissolved into a grand impossibility.

While a printed curriculum should never be viewed as a crutch to make teaching "easy," well-written teacher guides, student books, and supplemental resources greatly enhance preparation and presentation. A carefully developed scope and sequence provides a balance of Bible narratives, doctrinal

themes, and contemporary issues presented in age-level appropriate ways. Yet, even with innovative resources in hand, prayer, personal creativity, and adaptation are always important.

Although many printed curriculums are available on the market, unlike mankind, they are not created equal. This is particularly evident in the arena of Spirit-filled living, including, but not limited to, the issue of initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If referenced at all, non-Pentecostal curriculums tend to deal with divine healing and other evidences of the miraculous from a purely historic, "it happened back then," perspective. The faith of our children, youth, and adults must be stirred to believe for the miraculous today. It is vital that students receive a broad exposure to all of God's Word and the doctrines that form the foundation of our faith.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

The challenge of holding the line on biblical and moral absolutes and doctrinal distinctives will become exponentially greater as we move further down the Great Commission timeline. "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine," Paul warned. "Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3,4). Today, while we have opportunity, we must continue to build the foundation of biblical and doctrinal understanding among our children, youth, and adults. That is the mission and mandate of the Gospel Publishing House and its curriculum ministry, Radiant Life Resources. 

John T. Maempa is editor in chief, Radiant Life Resources, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, Missouri.



**Scripture references are from the New International Version.*



"Last Sunday when I talked about the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen, some of you thought I was referring to your building pledges."

interview

WIT H DEBORAH

M. G ILL

A Passionate Call for Christian Education



DEBORAH M. GILL

Deborah M. Gill is the new national director of the Division of Christian Education and commissioner for the Commission on Discipleship. She replaces LeRoy R. Bartel who resigned to take a pastorate in Longview, Washington.

Gill is the first woman to have been named to a national director's post in the Assemblies of God. An Assemblies of God minister, Gill has the following educational credentials: a B.S. in music education; M.A. and M.Div. in biblical languages; and Ph.D. in biblical studies, Old and New Testaments.

Having served as the senior pastor of Living Hope A/G in North Oaks, Minnesota, for the past 4 years, Gill previously served in missions, teaching at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Manila. For the past 15 years, she has taught at North Central University, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gill began her duties February 1, 2002.

Enrichment visited with Gill about her new role and her goals for Christian education in the Assemblies of God.

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

GILL: I'm from the Twin Cities in Minnesota, which are Minneapolis and St. Paul. I grew up in a wonderful church, Summit Avenue Assembly of God. I thank God for an incredible Christian heritage. I grew up in a Christian home. Mentoring took place at every meal.

HOW DID CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SHAPE YOUR LIFE?

GILL: My home church had a wonderful Christian education program. In fact, many people came to our church because of its Sunday school. We also had Missionettes, Royal Rangers, and Bible Quiz. Christian education was important.

Richard Dresselhaus was my pastor when I was growing up. He influenced me very much. He started a pastor's instruction class, which was like an Assemblies of God catechism. He wanted to spend quality time with the young people in junior and senior high. Every Saturday morning he met with us. Those were quality Christian education experiences because we all esteemed Pastor Dick. For him to spend time with us was powerful.

I've had tremendous pastors in my life, people who loved education, loved the Word, and did it with depth and passion.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION AND MINISTRY EXPERIENCE.

GILL: My first degree was in music education from the University of Minnesota. I love music. I wanted a degree to support myself and to complement my ministry. Later, the public school I had been teaching in was closed

due to declining enrollment. I said, "That's my green light. Now I can go to North Central University and prepare for ministry. "

I attended college days that spring. One of the professors said, "Debbie, since you already have a degree, you would not need to start all over. Do you want to go to the seminary?" I then enrolled in the masters of divinity program at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri. I was the first female graduate in that program from our seminary. After the M.Div., I completed the masters of arts in biblical languages.

I had a 1-year missions experience primarily in Singapore and the Philippines, although I went to quite a few countries in Asia. That opportunity opened up when I was teaching at Central Bible College, and I was also the singles pastor at Central Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri. Naomi Dowdy, a single missionary who pastored a church in Singapore, spoke to my singles group and we became friends. This is why I spent time on the mission field. Naomi let me stretch my wings. I taught in the master's program at the Far East Advanced School of Theology in Manila, in the Philippines.

After this I completed a Ph.D. in biblical studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. I have a double major in Old and New Testaments. I wanted to study the Bible. My central calling is the ministry of the Word.

I had a wonderful education and I value it. But in a personal sense, the things that have been the most influential are the lessons I've learned through people and with people. When we're mentored, coached, and guided, then we hone our skills. The learning that's been most beneficial in my life has been in a relational context.

YOU'VE BEEN A PASTOR FOR THE LAST 4 YEARS. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

GILL: I always felt pastoring would be where I would end up. There had been opportunities in education, but there

were never any opportunities to pastor. I had been teaching at North Central University for about 15 years. I realized that unless I did something to pursue this myself, the doors probably wouldn't open. I talked with my section, my district, and I was planning to plant a church. I was about ready to launch it when two of my colleagues from North Central University called me. They had been pastoring Living Hope Assembly of God in North Oaks, Minnesota. They were leaving for other ministry opportunities. I went through the candidating process, and the church elected me. The theme of my installation service was a destiny of divine design. It looked like we were made for each other.

GIVEN YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A PASTOR AND EDUCATOR, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PASTORS CONCERNING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

GILL: The world has changed so much that the people who come to know Jesus in our churches today don't have any basis of Christian education. They don't know anything about the Bible. They need to get a good foundation in Christianity. But they're not coming to us to get what we know they need. They're coming with their felt needs.

The world has changed so much that the people who come to know Jesus in our churches today don't have any basis of Christian education.

Sometimes we need to offer educational opportunities that will meet their felt needs and draw them in. Then we teach them biblical principles and values.

We need to make Christian education more relational. We need to do more than pass on information; we need to pass on skills and practical things. As a Bible college professor I learned this. I taught Greek, but what I really taught were students. Eventually I understood that I needed to pass on the truth, the principles, the passion, and the skills. It is possible for Christian

education to be "infotainment," where somebody who is a good presenter stands in front of the class and speaks, and we call it education. But Christian education needs to be incarnated and people have to process it. They want the skills and the practical things as much as Bible knowledge.

TWO THINGS I HEAR COMING THROUGH: RELATIONSHIP-BASED AND EXPERIENCE-ORIENTED. WOULD YOU SAY THOSE ARE TWO CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN REACHING POSTMODERN PEOPLE TODAY?

GILL: Definitely.

WILL THESE APPROACHES WORK IN THE SMALLER CHURCH?

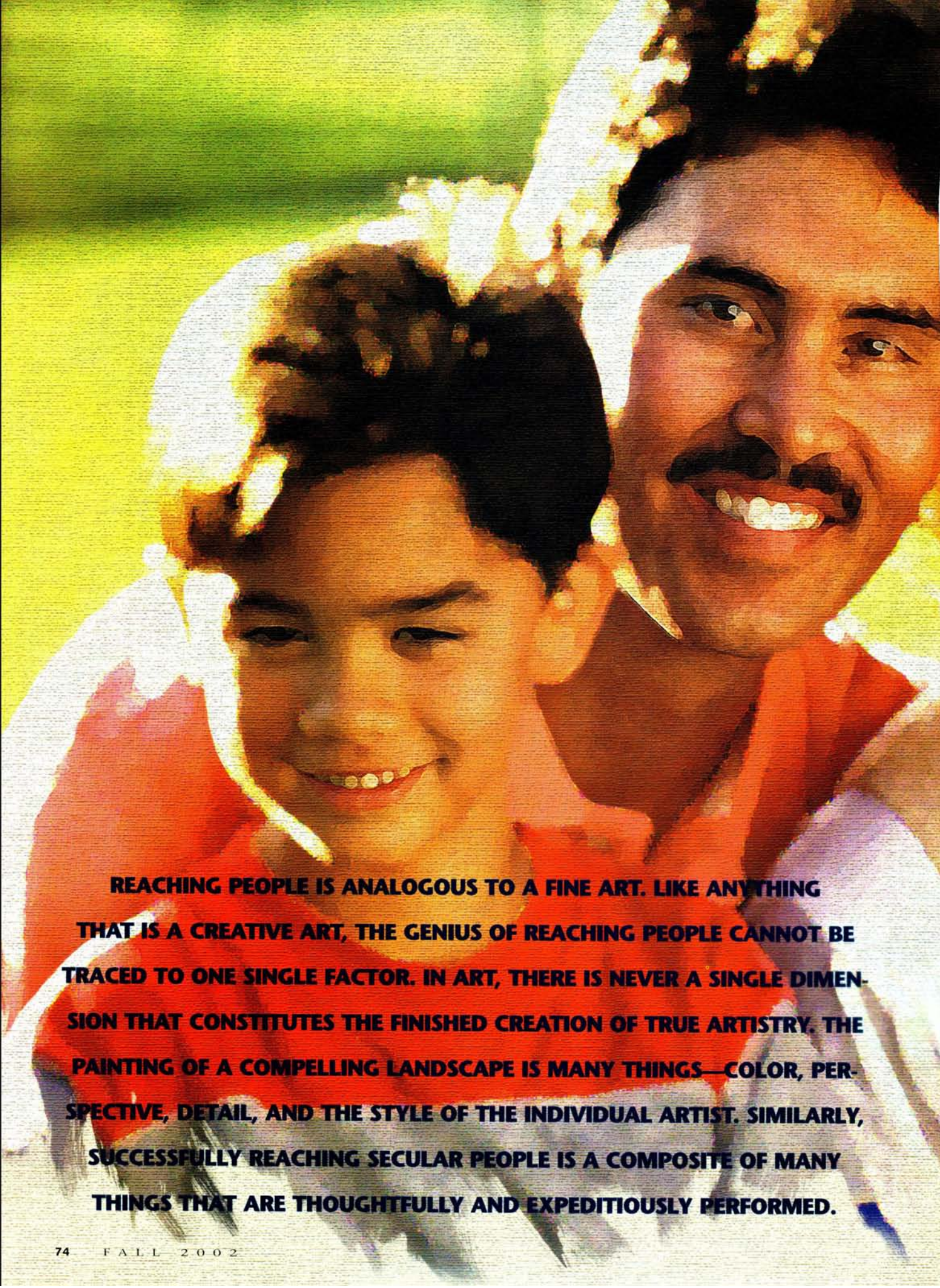
GILL: Yes. Even though our church was small, we believed in Christian education. It's not an option, because people need a foundation. These approaches work very well in a small church.

NOW THAT YOU'RE IN A ROLE TO SHAPE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR GOALS?

GILL: One of the goals is making our constituency aware of some of the incredible resources and tools we have. There is quality in the materials we

produce. We're not just a headquarters building; we're a resource center. We have published materials, Web sites, other media, and personnel resources. We have people here who have a wealth of information that can help pastors and church leaders.

The second goal is to make Christian education more relational. It can't be just a dynamic lecture, a person in front of a room disseminating information to others. There needs to be interaction, discussion, one-on-one discipleship, small-group discipleship, and mentoring. **E**



REACHING PEOPLE IS ANALOGOUS TO A FINE ART. LIKE ANYTHING THAT IS A CREATIVE ART, THE GENIUS OF REACHING PEOPLE CANNOT BE TRACED TO ONE SINGLE FACTOR. IN ART, THERE IS NEVER A SINGLE DIMENSION THAT CONSTITUTES THE FINISHED CREATION OF TRUE ARTISTRY. THE PAINTING OF A COMPELLING LANDSCAPE IS MANY THINGS—COLOR, PERSPECTIVE, DETAIL, AND THE STYLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL ARTIST. SIMILARLY, SUCCESSFULLY REACHING SECULAR PEOPLE IS A COMPOSITE OF MANY THINGS THAT ARE THOUGHTFULLY AND EXPEDITIOUSLY PERFORMED.



BY HOWARD YOUNG

The Fine Art of Reaching People

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It is a common mistake. Pastors and churches can be trapped by this misunderstanding and never know it. Specifically, that the church must do little more than open its doors on Sunday, and the non-Christian will come. Research over the past decade undermines this mistaken notion. People are staying away from churches in record numbers. It is time to ask why some churches are not vital links to the unconverted and what can be done to change a faltering outreach to the lost.

In some cases, Americans are turned off to both the message and messengers of organized religion. To many, the church has appeared narcissistic and self-serving. Leaders often leave behind shattered lives in the wake of their compromised leadership. The church's reputation was dramatically eroded and confidence in church leadership greatly shaken by the scandals of the 1980s. In 1974, nearly one half of the adult population expressed confidence in religious leaders, but that number plummeted to 22 percent by 1989. It would help the American church if our recent past did not haunt us, but the data brings little comfort.

SEEK CULTURAL RELEVANCE

The church must also consider the serious question of relevance. In the early 90s, a denomination surveyed a southern city where it wanted to plant a church.

The survey centered around a single question: Why don't you attend church? Seventy-four percent of those surveyed indicated they felt there was no value in attending church. Thirty-four percent believed the church had no relevance to the way they lived.¹ While the church does not exist to accommodate secular definitions of relevance, we must also face up to the dilemma framed in the lyrics of an old song: "Why spend our time answering questions no one's asking?"

What does it take for the elements of a typical church service to be relevant to the current culture? David Henderson advocates that two things must be true to establish relevance. First, the things that constitute a service—a sermon, an illustration, a testimony, a song, congregational worship—must somehow relate to life. It must broach critical, life issues and address in some manner the struggles and nagging questions that taunt the individual. In other words, does it meet needs? Furthermore, there must be a clear understanding and perception of the pertinence of the thing within the individual's life. Unless people see a pertinence to life, the various elements of a typical worship service do not seem relevant.² The critical aspects of our traditions, worship styles, and pulpit ministry must connect with real life on some level and under the Spirit's impetus create curiosity and desire.

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"The motion has been moved and seconded—with one abstention—that we increase the pastor's salary."

A wise church recognizes that bridges must be built between the contemporary culture of the unchurched and the culture of the redeemed church. Although we might suggest a number of strategies to accomplish this strategic goal, any strategy that is effective commences with a fundamental understanding of the existing popular culture. This understanding becomes the headwaters for directing a relevant and meaningful flow of redemptive ministry to the unchurched. For example, our inadequate use of contemporary language in everything from bulletins to preaching may lead people to feel that God is hidden somewhere in the past. Doctrinal and theological terms and concepts are commonly tossed about in a worship service with little or no explanation for the novice believer or the curious individual looking for spiritual answers. Such errors have led many to look other places for spiritual reality—places where terms are defined and operative concepts seem clear.

Prayerful and reflective thought should be given to preaching topics and courses of study in Christian education and discipleship that address the pressing issues of family, career, life disappointments, and a host of other current concerns. The lyrics of our worship songs and special music should resound with themes that convey God's deep love and passion for the lost. Our language and verbal images should immediately connect with the mental mechanisms of the uninitiated. Like Jesus, we need to take great care in putting the more abstract concepts of God and His kingdom in concrete terms that create a cultural connection.

Henri Nouwen captures the plight of the church that does not understand the culture to which it ministers. Although we long to touch people's lives in a meaningful manner, he suggests that we find ourselves on the "periphery, often pleading in vain for admission."³ This is the high cost of not understanding a generation, not doing the homework necessary to gain a fair hearing of the gospel.

BEYOND CULTURE, ADVOCATE BIBLICAL EXPERIENCE

A common misconception exists that seeking to accommodate any cultural dimension of the American public means an automatic betrayal of both the biblical message and methodology. This does not have to be true. In fact, it is impossible to meaningfully effect change in the life of the individual or society as a whole without a complete commitment to a biblically sound message and methodology. Assuming that anything short of a true biblical experience of regeneration can override negative cultural tendencies or expunge destructive personal issues within the individual will always lead to disappointment.

There is, however, a pressing need to understand that it is possible to be culturally sensitive, and at the same time

great care must be taken to ensure that the experience is biblical in nature and expression. Ensuring a valid biblical experience requires a thoughtful handling of Scripture by those who share God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Bible cannot be read and presented like any other book. Often passages are cited, and only what seems meaningful or interesting at the moment is considered. But the Bible is more than a giant resource manual for life. Our understanding of the Scripture's overall message is lost when we dip into its contents in the same manner we would look for information in an encyclopedia.

No part of the Bible stands alone. Like reading a novel, each character, each turn of events, every description of conversation must be compared to the overall

for the preservation of the godly influence of His church in the world, despite the pernicious influences of unredeemed culture and the assaults of the devil (John 17:15-17).

Beyond individual and corporate godliness, another striking and compelling feature of the biblical lifestyle that appeals to lost individuals is the high sense of community that is engendered when the local church fleshes out the principles of the New Testament. Therefore, a primary task of the contemporary church is to convincingly demonstrate the benefits of biblical lifestyle and community in the context of the surrounding culture. The challenge of creating an attractive sense of community suggests a meaningful engagement with the surrounding culture through things such as language, food, acceptable styles

A common misconception exists that seeking to accommodate any cultural dimension of the American public means an automatic betrayal of both the biblical message and methodology.

biblically sound in our approach to the unchurched. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive. In fact, both ideas are mutually inclusive by using strategies that accomplish relevant communication to the unchurched.

Cultural sensitivity and the biblical message are integral to the often-complicated task of leading individuals to a personal relationship with Christ. The biblical message is the part of the process that says, "Christ's love and forgiveness are your only hope. There is no other way." Cultural sensitivity is the component of the approach that says, "I understand who you are, how you are thinking, and what you are feeling. Here is how Christ can help you deal with these issues."

In light of the critical issue of effectiveness in reaching the lost, it is essential to define the term *biblical*. Since it is the mission of the church to lead secular people to biblical experiences—such as salvation, healing, or Spirit-infilling—

plot. This approach not only makes the Bible more enjoyable, but also ensures that our presentation of the biblical message is accurate and, consequently, relevant in character and transformational in nature for secular individuals.

CULTIVATING BIBLICAL LIFESTYLE

The biblical lifestyle adequately lived within any culture will, over time, become a powerful influence for encouraging the reign of God within secular people. The church has the unique challenge of maintaining a godly lifestyle, despite the damaging influences of culture, but at the same time relating to the culture in such a way as to convince the unbeliever of the power and validity of the Christian message. Jesus assured the disciples that the negative influences of unredeemed culture need not paralyze the positive influence of godly individuals (John 15:8-10, 16). Furthermore, Jesus prayed

of dress, or other customs to which the church may respond without being controlled by the culture. This reality led Gunder to observe that the faithful church critiques its cultural environment, particularly the dominant culture; affirms those aspects of culture that do not contradict the gospel; speaks the languages of the surrounding cultures and of the gospel; constantly tries to communicate the gospel in the surrounding cultures; and is cultivating and forming the culture of God's new community, a culture not of the world.⁴

Gunder's assertion does, in a manner of speaking, make the church bicultural. On one hand, the church is conversant with critical aspects of the prevailing culture, while at the same time living the ethics and principles of the gospel, mirroring the biblical lifestyle in each pertinent life context of church, family, career, and contemporary society.

In many ways, the Early Church serves as a template for Spirit-empowered churches endeavoring to maintain a strategic cultural contact with the world around them and simultaneously develop a true Spirit-culture. The primitive church was stirred to a deep sense of self-identity, which led to initial efforts to create a cohesive community among themselves. Some of these efforts were productive, while others, like community ownership, would largely die off before the end of the century. Critical features of the early Christian culture have, however, persisted to the present day. Prayer, community worship, testimony, proclamation and teaching, concern for the needy, church administration, spiritual givings, mutual concern for each member of Christ's body, and many other aspects of the Early Church have

is essential to reaching secular people. Creating the pastoral church is a matter of planning and implementation. Human and material resources must be mobilized in a manner that energetically seeks the lost who are not yet in the kingdom of God, or those who were once in the church. Current ministry opportunities create a pressing mandate for creative thinking that can spark new programs of compassionate and helpful ministries that convincingly address the needs of both the church and unchurched.

The present need to prayerfully and carefully develop outreaches and programs of ministry is overwhelming. One church may, for example, recognize that a growing number of single parents need pastoral assistance from the church. Perhaps a car repair program could be started by mechanics in the church.

"It is not enough for us to understand our world from afar. We need to wade into it and rub shoulders with those we desire to reach. We need to be willing to get our cuffs smudged by the world, living life with non-Christians on their terms and not ours. When we enter the world of men and women around us who don't know Christ, we lay the groundwork for real communication to take place.¹⁵

Reaching people is analogous to a fine art. Like anything that is a creative art, the genius of reaching people cannot be traced to one single factor. In art, there is never a single dimension that constitutes the finished creation of true artistry. The painting of a compelling landscape is many things—color, perspective, detail, and the style of the individual artist. Similarly, successfully reaching

In many ways, the Early Church serves as a template for Spirit-empowered churches endeavoring to maintain a strategic cultural contact with the world around them and simultaneously develop a true Spirit-culture.

persisted through the centuries and still powerfully represent the validity of the Christian message.

CREATE A PASTORAL CHURCH

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of sharing God's kingdom with lost people is developing the local church into a singular pastoral unit. Too often we think of the pastoral ministry as coming from the paid staff of the church. The implications of this misconception can be detrimental to God's kingdom on earth. Unless a church is extremely small, no one individual can possibly bring the passion of the pastoral heart of God to the entire congregation. In fact, no amount of church staff are adequate for the continual revelation of Spirit-inspired love and care to the congregation and people lost in secular and materialistic lifestyles.

Developing the entire church into a powerful and passionate pastoral unity

Some aging members of a congregation may need assistance with shopping, cleaning and repairing their homes, health care, and a number of other opportunities for ministry. Secular people experience deeply felt needs in the area of career, family, and personal issues.

Why should the church remain silent when people are crying for help in virtually every area of their lives? If the church does not speak and respond relevantly and passionately to the lives of secular people, they will seek answers elsewhere. Reminiscent of Jesus' pastoral love for His flock, the church must make the conscious decision to leave the comfort of familiar things, and with the heart of a good shepherd, seek those who are lost.

David Henderson invites us to enter the world of the lost, to engage secular individuals on a level that gets their attention:

secular people is a composite of many things that are thoughtfully and expeditiously performed. **E**

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R

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Where does human ambition

meet God's will in our lives?

Are the pursuits of life

motivated out of a

desire to please

God, myself,

or both?

Biography

is a popular television program that reviews the lives of well-known personalities.

While I was watching a program about a political figure, the words of this individual,

"Yes, I am a very ambitious person," impacted me. The previous hour had been spent reviewing his goals, objectives, and projects.

As a minister, I wondered, *Where does human ambition meet God's will in our lives? Are the pursuits of life motivated out of a desire to please God, myself, or both?*

Many of us face this dilemma. The active pursuit of ambitious goals is hindered by the devotion to daily duty. We are often hindered from doing

what we want by the demands of what we must do.

Each of us has a routine that locks us into patterns of behavior that hold back certain ambitions. "One day, I'm going to . . ." Soon days turn into weeks, months, and years. The ambitions of youth become buried.

Ambition is defined as a desire to achieve a particular end or task. Ministers need to be careful to fit human ambition into the framework of God's will. "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21*).

God's Word encourages us to be ambitious. But with the encouragement also comes a definite boundary to submit

to God's authority. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

Others sometimes criticize ambitious people, confusing focus with arrogance or harshness. However, godly leaders must never allow ambitions to become a license to abuse others. In our pursuit of God, we cannot forget the people of God.

AREAS OF AMBITION

The results of human effort, yielded to the Holy Spirit, are still being revealed. Christians sometimes take a shotgun approach to God's call, aiming in His direction hoping to hit something.

However, ambitions must be rifled toward a specific target.

Ambition and accomplishments

Jesus prayed in the Garden, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

Our ambitions must go beyond having nice church services in nice buildings for nice people. Here are a few ambitious goals:

- Salvation of the lost
- Church growth
- Believers maturing
- Believers baptized in water
- Believers baptized in the Holy Spirit
- Believers involved in ministries

pursuit of position. There is a place for ambition for position, provided one's intentions are to glorify God.

To achieve any position, elected or appointed, many factors come into play:

- Personal qualifications are critical (1 Timothy 3:1-7).
- Obedience and faithfulness to God's work are important (Matthew 25:14-30).
- Godly character is essential (Romans 12).
- Approval from God and spiritual leaders is necessary (Hebrews 13:17).

Ambition and experience

Life is an ongoing chain of experiences that are linked together.

These experiences affect, in various degrees, our entire life. Here are three areas where ambition

is joined with experience:

1. *Spiritual experiences.* The Bible is a continuous

open door into someone's life.

However, ambition for personal experiences must be tempered by divine duty. Life's realities and biblical duties must check the pursuit of personal ambition.

3. *Professional experiences.* What is your ambition for the church you attend or serve? Ambition, tempered by the Holy Spirit, moves us on to great levels of achievement in our profession.

Ambition and relationships

The advancements of technology have not replaced the need to have healthy relationships.

No one has come to the point of not needing

others. But healthy relationships

don't just happen. We

must invest ourselves in

Ambition and position

Whether in the business or church world, some people have a burning ambition for position. Is there a place in the life of a minister for such ambition? First Timothy 3:1 states, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." A fuzzy area of ambition is the intention behind the action. One's actions may appear to be honorable while his or her intentions are deceitful.

Within the context of the ministry, an unbridled ambition for position has wounded many people. The perceived need for man's acceptance has pushed some ministers to lay aside biblical principles of conduct in ambitious

record of people being ambitious to experience God's power and presence.

¹ Every believer should have a hunger and thirst for God's active power and presence. But ambition for spiritual experiences is not an end in itself. Rather, we are to be continually conformed into Christ's image. Being spiritually ambitious helps us grow in Christ and serve Him effectively.

2. *Personal experiences.* A minister must not stop being a regular person. We are not religious robots without healthy interests of our own. Just because an activity is not church does not mean it is wrong. Personal interests keep us balanced and in touch with those we desire to reach. A shared interest can be an

others while we also enjoy the blessings from others.

A major danger of highly ambitious people is the tendency to focus on the task and in the process to forget, use, or even abuse people. Relationships are of far more value than marking items off a to-do list.

THE FULFILLMENT OF AMBITION

If we don't have any ambition for tomorrow, where will we be in the future? Ambition is compatible with our faith. The Holy Spirit is the most creative power in the universe. We need to be ambitious for His power and presence.

Unfulfilled ambition can cause one to lose heart or run out of energy. When

ambitions don't materialize, it is easy to become frustrated. We're admonished, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). The key is in two parts—our actions and God's timing.

What fuels your ambition?

- Human ego?
- Self-worth based upon accomplishments?
- Competition with others?
- The fire of the Holy Spirit?
- The discipline of God's Word?
- Obedience to God's plan for your life?

The fulfillment of ambition for

be anything less than faithful to Him.

Ambitions are unfilled at times because someone was unfaithful at the moment of divine opportunity. Faithfulness requires that we master the mundane. Life's routine can become boring, and boredom can make us vulnerable to unfaithfulness.

2. *Our diligence.* At times serving God simply requires bulldog determination. Your diligence in serving God will bless your world.

3. *Our talents and gifts.* Each of us is unique. God blesses us with certain talents and gifts, by which we are to accomplish His will. In the pursuit of

25:14-30) is a clear example of talents, ambition, and God's gifts coming together. Each man received a talent "according to his ability." Even though different amounts were given to each one, each had some ability.

The men with five and two talents had ambition to blend God's resources with their ability. Each doubled what they had received. Remember, if you are ambitious for blessings, you must also be a responsible steward of those blessings.

The man with the one talent had the same opportunity. Yet he chose to be lazy. He was condemned for his lack of effort.

Ambitions are unfilled at times because someone was unfaithful at the moment of divine opportunity.

the child of God has two areas of responsibility, God's role and ours.

God's Role

God's role is threefold:

1. *God's will.* The world today, both secular and Christian, encourages us to go for the gold. While excellence is admirable and desirable, we cannot define the gold for ourselves. Our life is not our own; we work for God. His will must be superior to ours at all times and in all circumstances.

2. *God's sovereignty.* Man's knowledge and achievements have inflated his ego. Even ministers have promoted their own ambitious agendas. God humbles us by His sovereign will and power. Balance returns to our life when we realize that God is in charge.

3. *God's timing.* There is a place and time when divinely inspired ambition meets divinely ordained opportunity. God is in control of the seasons of our life. He has a time for us to reap the harvest of His blessings.

Our Role

Our role in seeing ambition fulfilled is also threefold:

1. *Our faithfulness.* God has committed all the resources of heaven to His children. He is ever faithful to us. We should never

ambitious goals, it is easy to focus on what others have and what we don't.

Romans 12:6 states, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." God did not create us with the same gifts because our assignments in life are different.

Our biblical responsibilities are clear:

- Do not neglect your gift
(1 Timothy 4:14).
- Fan into flame the gift of God
(2 Timothy 1:6).
- Use the gift to serve others
(1 Peter 4:10).

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew

Many fail because they are too ambitious and get ahead of God. More fail because they lack ambition and fail to follow God.

THE DANGERS OF AMBITION

There is a critical danger in unchecked ambition. It can easily move into obsession. Ambition that is controlled by the Holy Spirit is productive for the kingdom of God and the believer. Obsession is being controlled rather than being in control. To be obsessed is to be out of balance. This is a violation of the scriptural principles dealing with moderation and balance.

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"We're from the police department explosives unit. We have reason to believe your sermon will bomb on Sunday."

The dangers of ambition come more with its successes than with its failures. We try to reduce success to a formula. For example, if we do church a certain way, then we will duplicate the results of others. Things don't work that way.

Concerning spiritual matters, the danger is that many try to do God's work in man's strength and wisdom. "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:3). Sadly, many ministers today confuse human personality with godly anointing.

Church history has deep scars as markers of ambitious follies. Some modern evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic ministries have caused great damage. The actions of overambitious leaders, at any level, have clearly shown that they placed their personal agendas above God's agenda.

There are untold stories of local pastors who, in their ambition to build the church, have crushed others. People have been used as stepping-stones.

Overambitious ministers have sacrificed spouses, children, and church members on the altar of human ego. Rather than the cause of Christ being the priority, it becomes a personal cause.

The idea that the bigger the ministry, the better I look, has fueled many ministers' ambitious flames. Numbers do not verify nor nullify God's will and blessings. Obedience and faithfulness are still His standard to define success.

The danger of compromise is always present in the pursuit of ambitious goals. One may compromise on strategy, but biblical principles must never be compromised. Commitments to godliness, holiness, duty, and honor are left behind just to see another mountain of life conquered.

Unbridled ambition and desires can be the source of quarrels among the family of God. "We can have it now if we only. . . ." is the temptation Satan still casts before us. There is no place for the compromise of eternal biblical truths for the sake of human ambition.

CONCLUSION

Where does human ambition meet God's will in our lives? When these two powerful forces meet, man's ambition must always yield to God's will. No task, ideal, or goal is nobler than to do the will of the Father.

No one can solve this dilemma for us. Each of us is individually responsible to find a balance. We must allow the Holy Spirit to continually check our ambitions. The more we walk in the Spirit, the further we will be from following our sinful desires (Galatians 5:16).

I pray that the Holy Spirit births godly ambition in us to accomplish great things for the kingdom of God. Where He guides, His Spirit will provide all that we need. **e**

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**Scripture references are from the New International Version.*

Perpetuation: The Goal of Sunday School

BY BILLIE DAVIS

Dynamic maturity is what the apostle Peter demonstrated at the temple gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1–10*). He saw a lame man begging and cried out in joyful confidence, “What I have I give you” (verse 6).

Peter had something to share; he had been taught by the Master. He had learned and blundered and failed and learned again. Through this process he knew what he had. He had knowledge and power, and through Christ he put it into action.

Peter was aware of what he had. I can feel him tingle with understanding as he evaluated the situation. The lame man thought he needed money. Peter comprehended the real need and said—almost as a teacher in first grade, eager to teach a child to read—“Look. Look. I give you what I have.”

Dynamic maturity describes persons who have something, know the value of what they have, and are skilled and excited about giving it to others. The seed of this idea was planted in me when, as a child in Sunday school, I learned this memory verse: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

“Blessed means happy,” the teacher explained. “Giving makes you happy. That may sound strange to you, but people who give can be happier than those who receive.”

That did not sound strange to me. I was one of the high-profile poor—those who receive high-profile charity like Thanksgiving baskets. A big, shiny car filled with smiling, well-dressed people would drive up to my ragged tent on the edge of a cotton patch. I would stand before them, wrinkled and

barefoot, and say, “Thank you, ma’am.” It didn’t take much imagination for me to believe they must be happier than I. Wouldn’t it be neat to have something and be able to give it away?

STUDENTS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR DISCOVER PRINCIPLES I LEARNED IN SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Years later, in a college class, I came across the same idea. What I call dynamic maturity was expressed in academic terms: the Eriksonian model of psychosocial development. It has been interesting to me as a student and professor in the field of behavioral sciences to find how often reports of complex research announce the discovery of principles I learned long ago in Sunday school. I can only conclude that sincere seekers after truth eventually find at least some fragment of it.

Erik Erikson, a great social psychologist, was trying to objectively describe the development of human beings in stages of experience and behavior throughout the life span. He noted that persons do not grow as isolated biological beings. They begin at birth to relate to other persons. They grow as social beings while they develop physically and as thinking and feeling persons. Their relationships with others influence the way they think, feel, and act. For example, an infant born into a family where love and care are expressed learns to trust people. Trust becomes a primary foundation for all relationships with people and with God. On the other hand, a child born into a home where love and care are not evident is likely to feel fear and neglect. His attitudes throughout life may be quite

different from those of the child who learns to trust.

Erikson proposed that the life span includes definite stages during which persons face new challenges and accomplish what he calls the developmental tasks of childhood and adulthood. The first task, as we have noted, is to learn to trust, so positive human relationships are possible. The second he calls autonomy. This means the child grows out of complete dependency and begins to become an individual person on his own. Then Erikson suggests tasks called initiative, industry, development of identity, and learning to make intimate commitments, such as are required for successful marriage.

MATURE PERSONS GENERATE NEW LIFE.

The person who accomplishes these tasks of growing up reaches a stage that Erikson calls generativity. When we speak of adulthood, usually we use the term *maturity*. But this word has a kind of finality; something completed. The term *generativity*, on the other hand, connotes action. To generate is to get something started. When we use the noun form, *generation*, we speak of continuity, passing on something to the future; perpetuation. I think of generativity as energy and perpetuation; continuity. This is what we need in the church.

In our society we seem to encourage the idea that growing up is becoming independent, getting into position to do things for yourself. Erikson came closer to the ideal model of maturity when he called it generativity and described it as a stage of capacity and commitment. At

this stage persons are able to think and act independently, but they are willing to become involved in increasingly complex social responsibilities. Achievements include the capacity to care and also the commitment to do something meaningful. This is quite different from the notion that maturity is the capacity to be one's own self-actualized man or woman.

Erikson emphasized the process of living, not the completion of some specific stage. He said the popular concept of maturity is based on a success ideology that can dangerously pervade our private and public lives and make us inept in the struggle for a "meaningful existence continuously." Most adults who report great happiness and satisfaction in life mention many involvements and obligations. Generally, they feel close to children and adolescents. They assume responsibilities. They work in voluntary associations. They are interested in the public welfare. They have the ability to suppress their own desires in favor of others. They express altruism, and, most of all, interest in the future, in teaching others—passing on to a new generation what they have acquired of skill and wisdom, what they have

assuming sustained responsibility for the growth, well-being, and leadership of others. If Christ is our model of Christian maturity, we relate to the idea of generativity. We see that growing up is not becoming independent. Success is not personal achievement. It is not taking control. Rather, it is making a personal choice to be in some ways dependent, to be responsible, to be involved. Maturity is a process of breaking away from one's own needs to see what one can do for others, a longing to be the giver, rather than the receiver. Growing up is breaking away from certain dependencies, not to be a free individualist, but to become involved in developing others.

Generativity, or we could call it continuity, or perpetuation, may be the major biblical theme most neglected in evangelical Christianity. We have become almost obsessed with immediate, unusual, dramatic experiences. We tend to leave the impression that God's priority is a "revival" event.

God's priority is the consummation of His plan for human beings. He started it at creation. It is fascinating to me that God defined life in the instant

God created living creatures and told them to increase in number (Genesis 1:21–25). Then, speaking to His newly created humans, He said, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (verse 28). That was His first commandment to people. I've heard preachers make a joke of it, saying that was the first commandment, but not the most important. It was important. If they had not obeyed that one, there would have been no need for any other.

He said to His people, "I give you every seed-bearing plant . . . and every tree that has fruit with seed in it" (verse 29). Notice: God mentioned the seed every time. He defined life. We hear in His words the possibility of three generations: A tree, with fruit, with seed inside. We notice how God repeated with each mention of a living thing the power within it to perpetuate itself.

The definition of life is perpetuation. If it has the propensity within itself to perpetuate itself, it is alive. This is the definition of life given by biology teachers. The difference between life and nonlife is the ability to reproduce. What does not have the ability to bring forth after its kind is not alive. The first concern of God is that His creation will reproduce, perpetuate, generate new life.

Our propensity to equate the Spirit's moving with immediate and unusual events blinds us to the beauty and logic of His plan as it is explicitly outlined in Scripture. For example, if we plant a tree and care for it in the way God told people to care for nature, we look upon its incredible development from a seed and call it natural. But if we were to pray for a tree and find one fully grown the next day, that would be a miracle. I do not doubt that God could bring us a tree in a day if we were on a mission in His will and needed a tree for His purposes. God could make a tree for us instantly. But I see no less the divine plan in a tree I plant that bears fruit with its seed inside, and may live to produce a thousand trees beyond the day I die.

Generativity, or we could call it continuity, or perpetuation, may be the major biblical theme most neglected in evangelical Christianity.

known of beauty and of love. They see young persons not as a threat to displace them, but rather as their chance to generate before they die.

MEANINGFUL LIFE CONNECTS THE PRESENT WITH THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

What we need today as Pentecostal leaders in a postmodern culture is that concept of "meaningful existence continuously"—receiving from our heritage, maintaining the truth in our time, and passing it on to future generations. Christian maturity is not simply a goal for individuals. It involves

He created it. "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:11,12). I think He called it "good" because it had its seed inside. He need not come back every so often and do a revival of trees. The seed was in it. And every time He mentions vegetation, He mentions that it has seed in it.

THE SEED OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IS THE WORD WE PLANT IN OUR CHILDREN

God's plan for the perpetuation of spiritual life is based on the same principles as His plan for the perpetuation of nature and human life. The seed of spiritual life is the Word. The method of perpetuation is learning and teaching. After survival and procreation, teaching and learning are the essential human processes. Except for physical maturation and divine revelation, all that we are and know is the result of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are the essential processes by which God's work on earth is accomplished. His first relationship with Adam and Eve was a teacher/student relationship. God gave instructions and asked His people to interact with Him, and respond, as in the naming of the animals and avoiding the forbidden tree.

The principle of generativity is evident from the beginning. The consummation of God's plan depended on choosing a people and establishing a genealogy through which the Word would come. The Word did not come as a general impression to every person. It came in the form of spoken and written revelation that required what we call natural processes—learning, teaching, reading, and understanding. The method God chose to use with Adam and Eve in the Garden, He continues to use. He gave His people specific instructions and directed them in clear terms to keep His Word and

and spent the last 3 years of His earthly life teaching them. Then He commissioned them to teach and sent the Holy Spirit to guide them into truth and understanding for more powerful teaching.

Paul was an exemplary teacher, a model of generativity. He reminded Timothy of his foundational learning and told him to teach others who would be able to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). Here's that idea of the three-generation tree again. You have the seed in you, you pass it on to someone, who passes it on to others.

The letter to the Hebrews reinforces the relationship between Christian maturity and the perpetuation of the church through learning and teaching. It gives stern warnings about the dangers of sporadic growth and falling away. "You ought to be teachers," the writer declares, "ready for solid meat instead of coming back again for the milk of infancy. Let us leave the elementary things and go on to maturity. Not trying to lay the foundations all over again. We want each of you to show diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure . . . Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised, as Abraham who was promised many descendants" (Hebrews 5:12–6:1; 6:12–14, author's paraphrase).

Commentators on this portion of Scripture usually get sidetracked and address the problem of Christian

dramatic events and renewal than to stability and continuity. And outcomes are the result of values.

MATURE CHRISTIANS FAIL TO CONTRIBUTE BECAUSE THE CHURCH DOES NOT VALUE THE ASSETS OF MATURITY

We may be projecting the message that we value obvious talent in some performance more than consistent development and dedication. We value unexpected incongruent events more than patient planning and preparation. We value charismatic style more than intellectual competence. We value competition more than cooperation. We value intuitive action more than logical thinking.

We hear many sermons on the general principles of outreach—evangelism and missions. We hear almost nothing about consistent, intentional teaching of values, or the preservation and perpetuation of our heritage within the church through the generations. We hear negative references to programs and the danger of thinking within the walls of the building more often than appreciation for the teaching ministries going on in our Sunday schools.

In other words, we tend to devalue the major assets of maturity. Competent, achieving, experienced persons want opportunities to produce and share what they have and know. Many have almost a compulsion to teach. This is the driving force that ensures continuity of life and institutions. It reflects human purpose in the plan of God.

The opposite of generativity is stagnation. Often adults are allowed to feel useless and unnecessary. Stagnation in the church is not so much an individual weakness as it is a by-product of failure to encourage generativity. At the stage of life when mature adults most need to generate life and nourish others, many of them seem content to sit quietly and partake as children drinking milk. They seem inclined to avoid involvement. They want freedom to enjoy their own interests and the rewards of retirement. But for many of them, this is a defense mechanism to

**The first concern of God
is that His creation will reproduce,
perpetuate, generate new life.**

His power alive among their own children through the generations, and then extend the teaching to others.

God ordained teaching priests to give instructions and guidance in worship and godly living. Moses organized teaching artisans to accomplish the work of the temple. Jesus made disciples

immaturity as though it was an individual weakness or failure. "Why don't Christians grow up?" I hear us asking. "Why don't more people take responsibility in the church?" And so we struggle in every generation to recreate a tree. The answer is that we do not really value generativity. Far more attention is given to

keep from feeling unappreciated and bypassed as the church responds to current demands of the culture.

Today is marked by tremendous religious activity compatible with the electronic media and current tastes in entertainment. Super churches, super personalities, and rapid development of specialized efforts to meet cultural expectations powerfully influence the way Christian ministry is perceived by laypersons. Too often they do not understand their place in the perpetuation of God's plan because we have treated them as receivers. In the midst of our awakening to the needs of postmoderns, we must not forget how God defined life as He created it. He said, "Let the earth bring forth . . . herb yielding seed" (KJV). Note the parallel in the instructions God gives people, as recorded in Deuteronomy. When He gives a commandment, He provides for its perpetuation. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:6,7, "These commandments . . . are to be upon

your hearts." And then, "Impress them on your children."

SUNDAY SCHOOL PROMOTES GENERATIVITY—PERPETUATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

Sunday school is an agency God raised up to fulfill the function of intentional perpetuation within the church. As we reach out and adapt to changes, we tend to go to extremes by depreciating Sunday school. We fall into the trap of trying to promote one idea by pushing down another. Sunday school is the most effective and efficient means the church has to maintain the intergenerational nature of God's plan. It follows God's directive of explaining to the young in the body the meaning of the church's beliefs and practices. It ministers to everyone from infancy to eternity. It supports Christian family and provides positive peer groups, models, and mentors for youth. It gives family-type support at this time when many children come from disrupted or abusive families. The Sunday school is

generative. It is no accident. I heard it there first, for this is the heart of its power: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The hope and obligation of the church is to plant in Christians of all ages the seed of the Word and the sense of generativity. The goal of Sunday school is to give its members a solid biblical basis for their lives. They will have knowledge, and as Peter, understand the value of what they have. They will have confidence that what they have is superior to what the world thinks is important. They will be competent to discern the needs of others and eager to share what they have. The church with a good Sunday school is like a flourishing tree. It has its seed inside. **e**

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**Scripture references are from the New International Version unless noted.*

The Ministry of Teaching

B Y A N T H O N Y D . P A L M A

On several occasions pastor friends, knowing that my primary calling is that of teaching the Word, have said to me: “*God didn’t call me to teach; He called me to preach.*” This article will explore the teaching ministry as it applies to all ministers of the Word—and especially to pastors.

A BASIC QUALIFICATION FOR OVERSEERS

New Testament scholars generally agree that the terms *pastor* (*poimēn*), *elder/presbyter* (*presbyteros*), and *bishop/overseer* (*episkopos*) are interchangeable, each highlighting an aspect of the one calling. Paul listed basic qualifications for elders in two similar passages: 1 Timothy 3:2–7; Titus 1:5–9. Virtually all qualifications are ethical or behavioral in nature and, generally speaking, should be characteristic of all believers. The one that may be called distinctly professional relates to the ministry of the Word.

The overseer must be “able to teach (*didaktikos*)”* (1 Timothy 3:2). He must be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching (*didachē*), that he may be able

verses—“teaching,” “sound doctrine,” “able to teach.”

Surprisingly, the requirement is not that the overseer be able to preach (*evangelizō/kērussō*). How one defines terms is important to any discussion. The question, therefore, is why elders are not required to be able to preach, even though they will preach.

In his book, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, C.H. Dodd, a British scholar, emphasizes that preaching (*kerygma*) deals with the basics of Christ and His redemptive work as they are proclaimed to sinners. On the other hand, teaching (*didachē*) has believers as its audience and is designed to promote spiritual growth. Such a distinction may not be absolute, but the general point is valid. The elder’s responsibility is primarily to believers. In New Testament times, mostly apostles, evangelists, and laypeople carried on the work of evangelism.

ARE TEACHER AND PASTOR SEPARATE CALLINGS?

The ascended Christ “gave some as . . . pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Equally competent scholars are divided

class. They are listed separately in the gift list of 1 Corinthians 12:28 where “administrations” is generally identified with pastors. Romans 12:7 lists “he who teaches” among the gifts. Acts 13:1 mentions “prophets and teachers” who were in the church at Antioch. And Galatians 6:6: “And let the one who is taught [*katēcheō*] the word share all good things with him who teaches [*katēcheō*].” *Katēcheō* is a synonym for *didaskō*, the common word for “teach.”

THE PASTOR AS TEACHER

Even though teachers may exist as a separate calling in the church, the New Testament often places the pastor in a teaching role. Passages referring to shepherding and feeding the flock highlight this aspect of a pastor’s responsibilities (John 20:15–17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Most significant is the requirement that he be “able to teach (*didaktikos*,” 1 Timothy 3:2). With one exception, which suggests the translation, “able to learn,” key lexical authorities and translations render the word “skillful in teaching,” “apt at teaching,” “an apt teacher.” The only other occurrence of this word in the New Testament is in an extended passage in which Paul exhorted Timothy: “The Lord’s bond-servant must . . . be . . . able to teach” (2 Timothy 2:24).

The pastor is the counterpart of the rabbi in Judaism who was primarily a teacher of the Law. Jesus was sometimes addressed as Teacher, which meant He was regarded as a rabbi. Are all pastors teachers? Ideally, yes. But not all have exceptional teaching ability. This is implied in Paul’s statement that elders who rule well should be considered worthy of “double honor,” a

Even though teachers may exist as a separate calling in the church, the New Testament often places the pastor in a teaching role.

both to exhort in sound doctrine (*hē didaskalia hē hygiainousa*) and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). This article gives attention to key terms found in these

as to whether the Greek means “pastor-teachers” or is speaking of two distinct callings. In several passages teachers (*didaskaloi*) are in a separate category from pastors or appear as a distinct

euphemism which, rather bluntly, can be paraphrased, “more remuneration, especially those who work hard at preaching (literally, ‘in word’) and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17).

None of this precludes the pastor’s proclamation of the *kerygma*; that is, doing the work of an evangelist in seeking to convert unbelievers

didaskalia; the phrase is usually translated “sound teaching” or “sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). It also modifies *logoi* (words), producing the parallel phrase “sound words” (1 Timothy 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13). Also, the phrase “sound in faith (*hygiainontas tēi pistei*,” Titus 1:13; 2:2), may be translated “sound in

foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law” (Titus 3:9). Paul’s counsel consistently was for elders to occupy themselves with teaching sound doctrine to God’s people as an antidote to false and heretical teaching.

The “sound teaching/doctrine” of paramount importance is the apostles’ teachings, to which the early believers “were continually devoting themselves” (Acts 2:42). Today the apostles’ teaching can be understood as all of Scripture—and especially the New Testament. The elder is required to teach sound doctrine, which means basically to expound the Word of God to God’s people. The precise form this takes is relatively unimportant, whether it be preaching from the pulpit or informally leading believers into a healthful and helpful understanding of Scripture. **e**

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**Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.*

The pastor is the counterpart of the rabbi in Judaism, who was primarily a teacher of the Law.

(2 Timothy 4:5). Timothy, as all pastors, must also “preach (*kērussō*) the word” (2 Timothy 4:2).

THE NATURE OF THE TEACHING

Two basic nouns for teaching are related to the verb *didaskō*. They both speak of teaching as either an act of teaching (the active idea) or the content of what is said (the passive idea). Most of the emphasis is on the latter aspect, in which the words are sometimes translated “doctrine.” *Didachē* is used in speaking of Jesus’ teaching authority (Mark 4:2; 12:28) and of a form of inspired, intelligible speech (1 Corinthians 14:6). It is also used to speak of what is taught, such as the phrase, “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

Didaskalia likewise has the meaning of the act of teaching, or instruction, as in the passage, “All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching” (2 Timothy 3:16). It also has the meaning of that which is taught, as when Paul urged bondslaves to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10). The importance of teaching/doctrine in the pastoral ministry is highlighted by the fact the word *didaskalia* occurs 21 times in the New Testament, 16 of which are in the Pastoral Epistles.

THE CHARACTER OF THE TEACHING

A key word in the Pastoral Epistles is the verb *hygiainō*—to be healthy or sound. It is used as a participle modifying

the faith” and would parallel the two previous expressions.

The word sound must be understood in the sense of “true and correct” teaching as opposed to that of false teachers (*pseudodidaskaloi*, 2 Peter 2:1). Paul urged Timothy to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines (*heterodidaskalein*, 1 Timothy 1:3), which included “myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation” (verse 4). Along the same theme, Titus was urged to “shun



“I see Pastor got another compliment in the suggestion box.”

The “Openness of God” From a Pentecostal Perspective

B Y E D G A R R . L E E

The hottest topic on the evangelical-theological circuit these last few years has been the openness of God, also called *open theism*, *presentism*, and *freewill theism*. The doctrine of God’s omniscience has been revised by openness theologians to a form presumably more in keeping with modern sensibilities. Their project has triggered a spirited debate as to whether the revision is truly biblical and compatible with historic evangelical theology. This article takes a look at that debate from a Pentecostal perspective.

THE DEBATE

Early in the 1990s, several evangelical Arminians began to publicly question the orthodox consensus that God foreknows all future events, including all decisions that people can or will make. They suggested that much of the future is open to be decided only as free creatures make decisions as yet unknown to God. Among the most prominent of these theologians are: Clark Pinnock,

Christopher A. Hall published by *Christianity Today*.¹

Scholars from across the evangelical spectrum have joined in the debate. The Evangelical Theological Society is a major forum for evangelicals and its members have been major participants in this debate. The openness issue came to a head in the last annual meeting in March 2002. At that time, ETS members voted decisively for a resolution that included the following affirmation: “We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate, and infallible knowledge of all events past, present, and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents.”² This statement represents a decisive rejection of openness views.

The Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Conference have responded similarly to openness theology. The SBC adopted a resolution in June 1999, stating that “the omniscience of God extends to all creation and throughout all time, to all

our fellowship’s historic understanding of God’s omniscience.”⁴

Recognizing that different denominations have different theological agendas not always compatible with the Pentecostal tradition, Pentecostals should examine openness claims in terms of sound biblical exegesis and theological explication.

THE OPENNESS VIEW

Sanders has described the openness position with four points that may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Our all-powerful Triune God has created human beings with freedom, and their abuse of freedom notwithstanding, He remains committed to their freedom.

2. God decided to make some of His actions contingent on what humans do.

3. God’s providence is sufficiently general that He does not control every detail of human life and may even change His plans in response to what men and women do.

4. While God knows the past and the present exhaustively, His knowledge of the future is partly indefinite, or open (hence openness), and He does not know all that free persons will do in the future.⁵

An emphasis on dynamic human freedom is not new, being characteristic of both Calvinist and Arminian theologians (with differing definitions and emphases). However, to suggest that God’s providence is only general in nature, or that God is reduced to changing His plans when His creatures act, or that there are events in the future that God does not know is a major departure from the classical theology of both Calvinism and Arminianism. God’s

Pentecostals should examine openness claims in terms of sound biblical exegesis and theological explication.

one of the editors of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (1998); and Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (2000). John Sanders was also the openness partner in a two-part dialogue with

things actual and potential, even to the thoughts and actions of His conscious creatures, past, present, and future.”³ The BGC adopted a resolution in June 2000, declaring “that God’s knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive . . . we also believe that the “openness” view of God’s foreknowledge is contrary to

omniscience (God's perfect knowledge) and providence (God's perfect oversight of His creation) have been redefined by openness theologians, and this redefinition requires close scrutiny.

THE PROPONENTS' CASE FOR OPENNESS THEOLOGY

In making their case, openness theologians lodge several complaints against historic orthodoxy. One is the claim that orthodoxy has been influenced by Greek philosophy in ways that dim the biblical message. In the words of John Sanders, "The god of Greek thought is anonymous, self-sufficient, alone (unrelated), invulnerable, self-thinking thought, changeless, and egocentric."⁶ Interacting with these influences, early Christians theologians came to describe the God of the Bible—who warmly communicates with humans and reveals himself preeminently in the person of Jesus—with Greek philosophical language. Some terms that openness theologians single out are *impassibility*, implying a lack of emotion; *immutability*, implying an inability to change and respond to human situations; *timelessness*, implying immunity to subsequent changes in people over time; and His *simplicity*, implying inability of the Triune person to relate as Father, Son, and Spirit. In openness thought, these nonbiblical categories hinder our understanding and experience of the personal and relational God of the Bible. The openness theologians, then, are calling for reconsideration of classic Christian doctrines expressed in or affected by those terms.

Then, on these assumptions, the openness project gathers a number of passages from the Bible that show God relating to people in ways that seem to contradict classical theological categories. At first, these intriguing passages seem to show not only that God has emotions (challenging impassibility and simplicity) which is contrary to Greek thought, but that God also observes what people do and learns from them things He did not previously know (challenging timelessness and traditional

omniscience). Their passages also appear to demonstrate that God changes His mind and His plans to respond to what people do (challenging immutability). Usually cited in openness writings are the following texts and emphases:⁷

- Genesis 6:6: "The Lord was *grieved* that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."^{*}
- Numbers 14:11: "The Lord said to Moses, '*How long* will these people treat

me with contempt? *How long* will they refuse to believe in me?" "

- 1 Samuel 15:11: "I am *grieved* that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me."

- Isaiah 5:4: "*What more* could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, *why* did it yield only bad?"

- Isaiah 38:1,5: "This is what the Lord says [to Hezekiah]: '*. . . you are going to die; you will not recover.*' Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; *I will add fifteen years to your life.*" ' "

- Jeremiah 3:7: "*I thought* that after she had done all this she would return to me *but she did not.*"

- Jeremiah 19:5: "They have built the high places of Baal . . . something *I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.*"

- Jonah 3:10: "When God saw what they [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and *did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*"

- Matthew 26:39: "My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

- 2 Peter 3:12: "as you look forward to the day of God and *speed its coming.*"

If all the details of these texts were taken literally—without consideration

of the larger biblical context—they certainly would suggest that God does not know what human beings will do until they do it. Further, they would suggest that God not only responds personally and dynamically to people but also regularly changes His plans when they do not act as He hopes.

Moreover, on the basis of these and similar texts—and guided by a particular modern philosophy of time—openness

God knows every detail of the future, including every decision that His creatures will make.

theologians draw out the understanding that God does not, and indeed, cannot know every detail of the future. In their thinking, the future has not happened and simply is not there to know. Free agents such as men and angels have not yet made tomorrow's decisions nor acted on them. Therefore, those decisions and actions do not yet exist and cannot be known or controlled—even by God. It is further assumed that God cannot know all the contingent, or potential decisions and actions of human beings and angels. Many aspects of the future are thus truly open and yet to be determined.

Openness theologians do maintain that God has vast knowledge of the present and the past as well as of the things He has personally determined to bring about. God may also draw inferences from what He already knows. The Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world are good examples of events He has determined. It is the things free men and angels do that God cannot know in advance. So, openness advocates definitely restrict the traditional scope of omniscience. Omniscience is redefined to assert that God continues to learn and thereby change—at least in His knowledge, plans, and providential actions. The task is redefinition; they do not deny or abandon those doctrines in their entirety.

PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES SEEN BY OPENNESS PROPONENTS

Openness advocates contend that their modified view of omniscience lends itself to more dynamic Christian living across a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices.⁸ Probably the most compelling argument relates to prayer. As Boyd puts it, “many Christians have an understanding of divine sovereignty in which the urgency of prayer simply doesn’t make much sense . . . they believe that God’s plans cannot truly be changed; the future is exhaustively settled.”⁹ If God has not somehow, as in Calvinist thought, decreed and thereby settled all aspects of the future, then God, along with His creatures, discovers many things about the future as it unfolds in the normal course of events. God can then respond spontaneously, lovingly, and decisively to the believer’s prayers without being bound to a decree from eternity past. God can change His mind. God can go from plan “A” to plan “B.” God can immediately respond to the pain and suffering of His creation as it is happening. This kind of divine-human encounter appears to be made to order for the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man” (James 5:16, KJV) who desperately wants to move the hand of God. Viewed from this perspective, the arguments of the openness theologians seem particularly compelling.

CLASSIC TEACHING ON OMNISCIENCE

It is important, though, to set openness ideas into the context of historic evangelical theology as articulated by both

argued that God knows every detail of the future, including every decision that His creatures will make, simply because He has foreordained the salvation of the elect and the ordering of the universe. The Arminian, too, has usually argued that God knows every detail of the future, including every decision that His creatures will make. Unlike the Calvinist, the Arminian believes that God gives freedom to humans and angels to make their own decisions with the help of prevenient grace but without the compulsion of irresistible grace. Nonetheless, God fully knows in advance what those decisions will be, weaves them into His eternal plan from eternity past, and graciously guides His creatures and the universe they inhabit to a desired and certain consummation.

So, while Calvinists and Arminians interpret foreknowledge, predestination, and providence differently, the two classic traditions have historically agreed on the central issue at stake in the openness debates—God knows every detail of the future including all that free creatures can think and do, i.e. all contingencies, and does not have to change His plans with every human decision.

Arminian Theologians

Even though the advocates of the openness theology identify with Arminianism, they have deviated from classic Arminian teachings. James Arminius himself declared, “God knows all things from eternity, nothing [*de novo*] recently . . . He understands all things through His essence.”¹⁰ A long

present, and future.”¹¹ John Miley similarly noted, “Omniscience . . . must be prescient of all futuritions, whatever their nature or causality. Future free volitions must be included with events which shall arise from necessary causes.”¹²

Contemporary Wesleyan theologian, Thomas Oden, writes, “God’s knowing is . . . (a) eternally actual, not merely possible; (b) eternally perfect, as distinguished from a knowledge that begins, increases, decreases, or ends; (c) complete instead of partial; and (d) both direct and immediate, instead of indirectly reflected or mediated.”¹³

Assemblies of God theologians usually think in the same vein. Thus William Menzies and Stanley Horton assert, “God is omniscient, having infinite, universal, complete knowledge and insight. . . . All events, past, present, and future, are available to Him as present knowledge.”¹⁴

Calvinistic Theologians

John Calvin utilized the biblical term *foreknowledge*, which he separated from *predestination*, to explain God’s knowledge of the future. “When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under His eyes so that to His knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present.”¹⁵ Foreknowledge to Calvin is comprehensive embracing all of creation and all of time.

Unlike Calvin, more recent Calvinistic theologians have tended to equate foreknowledge and predestination. However, they consistently understand God’s knowledge to be comprehensive in scope. So with the Presbyterian Charles Hodge, “Among the objects of the divine foreknowledge are the free acts of men. The Scriptures abundantly teach that such acts are foreknown.”¹⁶ From the Christian Reformed tradition, Louis Berkhof maintains, “He knows all things as they actually come to pass—past, present, and future—and knows them in their real relations.” Berkhof adds, “It is

Even though the advocates of the openness theology identify with Arminianism, they have deviated from classic Arminian teachings.

Calvinists and Arminians. Certain differences of opinion between Calvinist and Arminian theologians over the nature of God’s omniscience have existed ever since Arminianism arose as a protest against perceived Calvinistic determinism. The Calvinist has usually

line of theological heirs has maintained that position. Samuel Wakefield commented, “Omniscience is boundless knowledge; and when it is ascribed to God the meaning is, not merely that He has power to know everything, but that He actually knows all things, past,

perfectly evident that Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events.”¹⁷ Reformed theologian Donald Bloesch states his own belief clearly, “God’s omnipotence includes His omniscience, by which He knows all things—even before they happen.”¹⁸

What this brief survey of representative evangelical theologians of both Arminian and Calvinistic persuasion clearly shows is that openness theologians have significantly deviated from both streams of the evangelical theological tradition.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE CONCERNING OPENNESS THEOLOGY

Having looked at the evangelical theological traditions, it is important to return to the Scriptures where this issue must finally be decided. There is another group of texts that uphold the classic tradition and cast a somewhat different light on the earlier group accentuated by openness theologians. Observe the following:

- Psalm 139:4: “*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.*”
- Psalm 139:15: “*My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*”
- Psalm 147:5: “*Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.*”
- Proverbs 15:3: “*The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.*”
- Isaiah 41:23: “*. . . tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods.*” [God’s challenge to pagan gods to do what He can do.]
- Isaiah 46:10: “*I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.* I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”
- Ezekiel 11:5: “*Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and he told me to say: ‘This is what the Lord says: That is what you are saying, O house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind.’*”
- Acts 15:18: “*that have been known for ages.*”

• Romans 8:29: “*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*”

• Hebrews 4:13: “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*”

These texts so definitively teach that God knows what free creatures will think and do in the future as to leave little doubt about the full-orbed biblical understanding of divine omniscience. It will not do to sweep away God’s comprehensive foreknowledge with a few hard-to-interpret texts or a fog of objectionable Greek philosophical terms.

The first group of texts cited that seem to show God dumbfounded before His creatures is most easily understood in the sense of God’s

God and His ways of warmly relating to His people. They rarely employ some of the old Greek philosophical concepts, such as impassibility, that seem to rob God of personality and responsiveness.

OPENNESS THEOLOGY AND PROCESS THEOLOGY

It is somewhat ironic to read the criticisms openness theologians make of orthodox Christian theology and its Greek philosophical terminology. As they describe God’s gradual accommodation to an unfolding future, one cannot help but think about process theology¹⁹ in which God, at least on a certain level, is growing and changing with the supposed evolution of the universe. While it is commonly agreed that openness theologians are not process theologians, they nonetheless interact extensively with, and appear to share certain assumptions with process theology. A major assumption is their view of

Having looked at the evangelical theological traditions, it is important to return to the Scriptures where this issue must finally be decided.

accommodating himself to limited human understanding. These texts employ gripping anthropomorphisms in which God is presented as though He was a human person in face-to-face relationships. In so doing, they also dramatically demonstrate that God wonderfully and personally relates to human beings in real time and space. Whatever God’s knowledge of the future may be, and whatever the mysteries of predestination and providence may be, He is always present in loving relationships with His people, answering their prayers and working out His good purposes in their lives.

It is almost as though openness advocates have not noticed that modern evangelical theologians have long since abandoned the more austere language of early orthodoxy and place far more emphasis on the personhood of

time that assumes God cannot know anything that does not yet exist.²⁰ While inveighing against the supposed dilution of early orthodox theology by Greek concepts, they themselves may very well have succumbed to certain nonbiblical influences from modern philosophy and theology. Donald Bloesch has pointed out that process theology “by positing a God who really does experience temporality . . . has done so at the price of letting go of the biblical truth that God is in full control of history.”²¹ Openness theology has not now reached that point but can it avoid continuing on the journey?

CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM

Some of the unfortunate fallout of the openness of God discussions may be a growing rift in the American evangelical
(continued on page 147)

The Power of Sequence: Parallel Points vs. Sequential Points

BY CRAIG BRIAN LARSON

The sermon form I cut my teeth on uses parallel points. Every point in the sermon bridges out of the transition in the introduction, and so all the points are parallel.

For example, in a sermon on Luke 12:22–34, the transition sentence could be “Jesus gives us five *reasons* not to worry.” The keyword is *reasons*. Every point offers a reason not to worry, and so every point is parallel in logic, bridging from the one transition. Here is a possible outline:

Jesus gives us five reasons not to worry:

1. God intends life to be much more significant than just getting food and clothing.
2. We can depend on God to provide for us better than He does for plants and animals.
3. Worry accomplishes nothing.
4. Worry makes us like those who do not know God.
5. God promises to provide for those who seek His kingdom.

This form of preaching—keyword

ideas in the text that do not fit the logic of our parallel points (or may shoehorn them into our outline).

In my example above, what can I do with an important idea in the text that does not give a reason to avoid worry? Verses 32–34 do not provide straightforward reasons not to worry, but they climax what Jesus said. Life is not just food and clothes; life is ultimately about experiencing the kingdom of God. In the satisfying life of the Kingdom, we are so free from seeking food and clothes that we can seek ways to give our things away.

If I feel bound to my parallel points, I might not include verses 32–34 in my sermon text, which would truncate this Scripture’s full, intended message.

Another downside of parallel points can be predictability. Once we have given the transition sentence in the introduction, everyone knows where the sermon is going. What we gain in clarity we may lose in suspense. If hearers are passionately interested in

flow into the next, rather than all flowing out of the transition sentence in the introduction. Point 1 leads to point 2, point 2 leads to point 3, and point 3 leads to point 4. It’s simple, logical, compelling.

Here is a topical sermon with points that follow sequential logic:

1. God loves every person.
2. But not every person responds to God’s love.
3. People can reject God’s love because God gives people the freedom to choose.
4. Our free choice has consequences.
5. And so, I urge you to respond to God’s love.

Notice how each point in this topical sermon flows out of the preceding point and leads to the next point. The points cannot be rearranged as they could be in a parallel structure.

Here is a sequential outline based on the exposition of a single verse, 1 Peter 4:10.

1. Each of us has received a spiritual gift from God.
2. These spiritual gifts come in many forms.
3. No matter what our gifts are, we have a responsibility to be faithful managers of them.
4. Identify and use your gift.

Again, using the longer Luke passage cited above as an example, if I develop points in sequential logic I might have the following outline:

1. Sometimes we are tempted to worry about our daily material needs (verse 22).
2. Such worry can make our making a living the primary focus of life (verse 30).

with parallel points—has the advantage of clarity. In addition, it suits texts that have parallel ideas or lists.

But not all texts have that shape, especially narratives, psalms, and longer sections of the epistles. When we try to force a text without parallel ideas into the grid I describe above, we may distort the text. Or, we may neglect important

every reason not to worry, predictability is a positive; if they are not interested, it is a negative. Whatever is predictable can bore both us and our hearers. But there is an alternative.

SEQUENTIAL POINTS

Our points don’t have to be parallel; they can be sequential. Each idea can

One significant difference between preaching in parallel points versus sequential points is the transitions.

3. Jesus said life is more than making a living (verse 23).

4. Worry prevents us from experiencing what God intends life to be (verse 29,30,34).

usually makes for awkward transitions.)

The solution is to repeat and rephrase points. As we conclude each point, we need to repeat or rephrase the point, then state the next point and

Sequential points follow patterns that people instinctively respond to, such as a problem-solution or question-answer pattern.

5. We can trust God to provide for us (verses 24,27,28).

6. We find real life in seeking and experiencing the kingdom of God (verses 31–34).

One advantage of sequential points: they keep the interest of listeners. Sequential points follow patterns that people instinctively respond to, such as a problem-solution or question-answer pattern. Notice in the Luke example that points 1, 2, and 4 explore the human problem, creating interest. Point 3 hints at an answer, and 5 and 6 give the full answer to our human need. The sequential approach follows an inductive rather than deductive logic, delaying the full discovery until the latter part of the sermon.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

One significant difference between preaching in parallel points versus sequential points is the transitions. With parallel points we typically transition between the points by numbering them and repeating the keyword. “The first *reason* not to worry . . . The second *reason* not to worry . . .” Calling attention to parallel points in this way brings clarity. It is simple for people to follow our structure because we mark points with a flashing light.

With sequential points, on the other hand, things get foggy if we do not carefully highlight the shift between points. Numbering and key words do not suit this form as well. (Although sequential point sermons can use the often heard keywords *principles* or *points* or “*things* I want to say,” and number these. This

repeat and rephrase it two or three times before proceeding to develop it.

For example, in the Luke sermon above, after I finished explaining and illustrating point 1, I could say, “And so we do worry sometimes about our daily material needs. Now, such worry has a huge drawback. Worry can make making a living the primary focus of life. We live to earn a paycheck. Our reason for being is nothing more than paying the bills.” Then I can develop the idea indicated in point 2.

After I have developed point 2, I can bring closure and move to point 3 by saying, “Because worry consumes our thoughts, it makes our making a living the primary focus of life. But Jesus says life is more than making a living. God created us to set our hearts on more than money, food, and housing payments.”

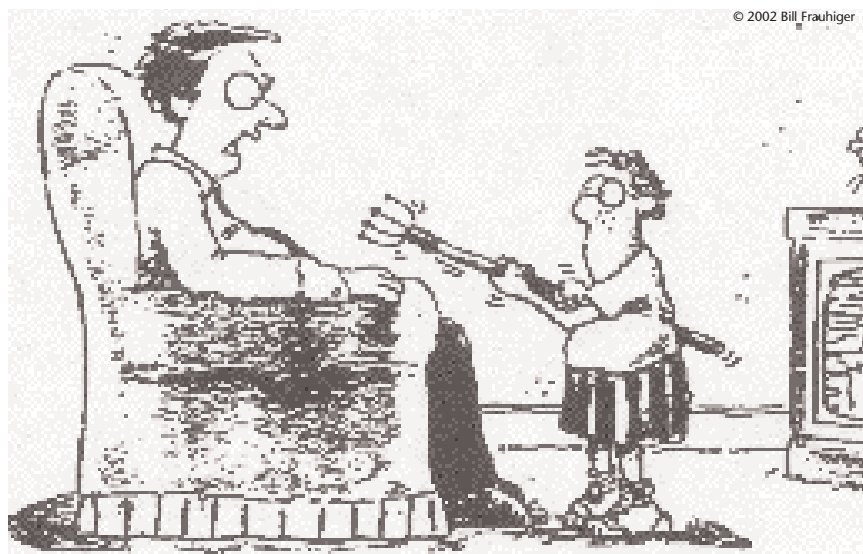
This is a natural, conversational way to transition between points.

One additional thing to watch for with sequential points: Be sure to stay on one subject. If we are not careful, a sequence of ideas can begin on one subject, and three points later end on another subject. This is especially likely in a topical sermon drawn from various texts. For example:

1. God loves us.
2. We should love others.
3. We may not feel like loving others.
4. Our feelings can lead us astray.
5. False teachers can also lead us astray.
6. All points must be subordinate to one overarching subject. In the Luke text above, my overarching subject is “How to experience God’s highest purpose for your life.”

You will probably not use sequential points in every message, but for many texts they produce interesting, biblical sermons. If using parallel points has been your only form of preaching, sequential points can open a whole new sermon world. **e**

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“I know I said I had a frog in my throat during my sermon this morning, but I didn’t really mean it literally. So put that thing down.”

Just a Spoonful of Sugar: Knowing How to Motivate Teachers

BY DANNY VON KANEL

The blahs. That's the only way to describe your feelings. Some teachers trickle in late. Others are never prepared. Adding to your groans is the depressing recognition that on any given Sunday, several classes have subs—others, no teacher at all. You begin to wonder if teaching the gospel has lost its appeal.

Submerged underneath the apparent indifference, lackadaisical appearances, and unenthusiastic approaches to teaching lies a dormant desire in teachers to impact their classes for Christ. The answer beckons a wake-up call—a call in the form of encouragement.

Motivation enhances productivity. Though some jolt themselves to greater action, other teachers aren't self-motivated. Enlivening comes from you. You make this happen easier when you build morale, nurture imagination, and facilitate personal growth.

BUILD MORALE

The highest achievable level of service comes from the heart. The church that

think you've lost confidence in them in any way, morale diminishes. Indifference takes root. Productivity comes to a standstill.

Build morale by:

- *welcoming new teachers.* A special introduction (prior to delivery of teaching materials) and a personal letter from the pastor welcoming them on board signals warmth and care.

- *having recognition banquets.* A banquet planned at the end of the church year, but promoted throughout, creates incentive.

- *posting teachers' names.* Names on classroom doors with their position helps teachers feel special and important.

- *sharing kind words with friends.* Positive comments about teachers to their friends have a way of getting back to teachers. Knowing you care enough to praise them brings the rewards of loyalty and greater commitment.

- *affirming.* Providing weekly comments of a job well done build morale.

Our Senior Focus class had just finished. After 13 weeks of teaching

opportunity to touch lives? I couldn't. With my spirit now lifted, why would I want to quit?

A woman attended her 20-year high school reunion. There she encountered her freshman-year art teacher. She told him she had decided to go to college as a result of his inspiration, and that she was now an art professor at a large state university. At the end of the evening's activities, the teacher searched out his former student, shook her hand, and said, "Thank you for saying those nice things about my teaching. You've really made my day."

"You're welcome," said the woman as she hugged him. "But let me thank you—you've made my life!"¹ Kind words touch others, and when said to teachers, they become inspirational jewels to continue impacting lives. And their morale soars.

NURTURE IMAGINATION

La Fontaine once said, "When the soul of a person is on fire with imagination, impossibilities vanish."² Teachers in Christian education face detriments to lofty imaginations. Their class members are plagued by the pursuit of pleasure, by worldly cares, and by a lack of commitment. Many in their class just want to survive—forget the exalted goals. Yet, if we nurture our students' imaginations, the impossible becomes possible. The conceivable becomes reality. It takes but a few reached impossibilities for teachers to cherish every teaching moment.

Nurture teachers' imaginations by:

- *modeling a heightened dream.* If you don't dream big, they won't.

- *finding God's will and leading your*

**Vibrant, energetic, and alive
teachers—inspired to take on the world
Christ—is what you want.**

reaches its teachers' hearts will provide the best service. Teachers respond best when their morale is high. Show them you care, and they will reciprocate.

Develop a strong level of trust with your teachers. Teachers must know you trust their abilities, decision making, and motivations. The moment they

the Book of James, I wasn't sure I wanted to approach teaching another lengthy Bible study. The study, visual preparation, and physical fatigue were seemingly too much. But some well-spoken words of affirmation changed my mind. It left me asking myself, *How could I pass up another*

teachers to join Him in what He is doing. Godly goals are always of a God like dimension.

- *asking*. “If you could remove fear, what would you attempt for God for His glory?”

- *celebrating successes*. Reaching high-attendance goals, grasping a new truth, and experiencing a new birth into God’s kingdom are means to celebrate. They provide the fuel to further ignite teachers’ imaginations.

- *sharing motivational books and literature*. The more you saturate minds with impossibility thinking, the greater chance big dreams become huge realities. Books, tapes, and magazines become ready resources.

CLASS MEMBER MOTIVATION

KEYS TO PROMPTING GREATER PARTICIPATION

1. *Ownership*. The more the class belongs to members, the greater the involvement.

2. *Leadership*. Enlist teachers who have the spiritual gift of teaching. Such teachers inspire participation.

3. *Creativity*. Always leave class members guessing what’s next. Change teaching methods often.

4. *Friendships*. Work on community. Classes open up when they know they are among friends.

5. *Successes*. Work on members experiencing small victories. Confidence grows. Involvement increases.

6. *Voice inflections*. A monotone voice is the root of class boredom. Vary the pitch and dynamics. Members are more likely to engage in learning when their interest is maintained.

7. *Genuine faith*. Live what you teach. It’s contagious. More is caught than taught. Members are fascinated with the real thing and will ask questions to get what you have.

8. *Outside Interest*. Show an interest in class members outside the classroom, and they will return the favor.

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No one dreamed our youth Sunday school department would shine. Indeed, if all our classes had been displayed in a panoramic view of the night sky, the youth department would have been invisible. That changed.

Sensing God wanted more, I challenged our teachers to increase our enrollment and attendance. Beginning with an enrollment of 35 and 20 average attendance, our first year peaked at 60 on roll, with 35 average attendance. The second year jumped to 95 and 45; the third, 115 and 60. Though not earth shattering, in a rural area this was remarkable. Our youth Sunday school has shown brightly because we captured the imaginations of our teachers—setting their hearts on fire for future growth.

FACILITATE PERSONAL GROWTH

Going on the overflow only lasts so long. Eventually, all they know, all they have mastered, spills out ad nauseam. Teaching becomes routine. Teachers wallow in a spiritual wasteland where decay sets in. An imperceptible harm pervades their thinking when they subconsciously decide to forgo trying anything new. Motivation dies.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Unless you try to do something beyond what you’ve already mastered, you will never grow.” Consistent growth kindles motivation.

Facilitate teachers’ personal growth by:

- *building in accountability*. Being responsible to someone else motivates you to achieve what’s being asked.

- *reaching for the impossible*. You will be amazed at how people rise to your level of expectation.

- *praying*. God’s power source magnified our attempts at growth.

- *goal setting*. Measurable goals become tools to track progress and encourage ongoing efforts.

- *modeling*. Teachers want to know that what you’re asking of them, you’re doing.

Darden and I recently began a journey together. Every Thursday, for an hour, we meet and discuss faith issues. Both of us have acknowledged our deep desire to go to another level with the Lord. As the elder Christian and staff member, I’ve been thrilled to be his model. Both our expectations have been high. So far, we haven’t been disappointed. As a teacher of young marrieds, he needs this nudge. He and I have kept each other accountable. The spiritual journey has raised our level of motivation.

Vibrant, energetic, and alive teachers—inspired to take on the world for Christ—is what you want. Yet, the motivation pill is sometimes difficult to swallow. Attach the sweetness of heightened morale, soaring imagination, and invigorated personal growth, and the medicine is on its way, helping teachers achieve their full potential. **e**

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E N D N O T E S

1. “A Teacher’s Influence,” Preacher’s Illustration Service #969, Vol. 14, No. 1, September 1998; Appleseeds: www.appleseeds.org/sept_98.htm (p.4).
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Counting Sheep and Taking Care of the Flock

BY GREG ASIMAKOULOPOULOS

When a pastor friend announced his retirement, his congregation held a banquet in his honor. My wife and I were invited. We were impressed with the unique centerpieces on each table. An artisan within the church had hand-crafted wooden sheep to stand guard over the baked ham, scalloped potatoes, and cheesecake. Considering the fact a flock was honoring their shepherd, I was impressed with their clever and most appropriate idea. As we left the dinner, Wendy and I were given one of the sheep.

That was many years ago, but that little painted pine ram continues to have a prominent place to graze among my books. From time to time, I gaze at that little wooden animal and thank God for my friend, Larry, who is now with the Lord.

Not long after Larry's retirement, I bought a small olive wood lamb from a street vendor while leading a tour in the Holy Land. Although crudely carved, it reminded me of a church member back home whose value was not in that person's physical beauty, but godly heart. It was a great companion to the Larry lamb back home.

Before I knew it, I was collecting sheep. Although my wife thinks my sheep-hunting expeditions are just an accommodation of my inner child who still likes to play with toys, my hobby is anything but child's play.

The lambs and sheep I collect represent certain unforgettable individuals I've been privileged to shepherd in two decades of ministry. Each represents God's grace in parishoners' lives.

One of my favorites came from a thrift store. It is dingy and dirty, just like

Kori, the little girl who attended the first church I pastored. Her parents were addicts. She dressed herself and walked to church each week because she sensed a love she'd never known at home.

Another one of my favorite sheep stands for Bob, a middle-age insurance underwriter whose wife left him after 38 years of marriage.

Still another one reminds me of Marty, a school janitor I led to the Lord and baptized in a water hazard on a golf course.

Then there's my Mae lamb. She is legally blind, has lost two husbands to death, and was forced to bear the unbearable burden of having a daycare provider beat her grandchild to death. As I look at the woolen miniature that reminds me of her, I am inspired by her godly perseverance.

For some, counting sheep is a desperate means to fall asleep. For me, counting the sheep in my collection is a deliberate attempt to remain awake to the rewards of being a small-church pastor. My fuzzy little flock is a tangible means of counting my blessings. It is a reminder of the unique privilege that comes with being a pastor of a smaller congregation. Pastors of larger churches are more like ranchers than shepherds. They'd be hard pressed to call each one of their flock by name, let alone celebrate their idiosyncrasies or personal stories.

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND THE SMALL-CHURCH PASTOR

Such joys that come with being a small-church shepherd are also shared by those who tend Sunday school flocks in congregations where pews are few. Teachers in such churches have the

privilege of getting to know their students, much like the pastor does. When there are but a handful of kids, teachers have the freedom to be more than just an instructor. They have reason to see themselves as shepherds, too.

From what I have experienced and observed, here are four considerations the pastor of the smaller church should take to heart when helping to recruit and train those who provide Christian education for our children.

Recruit teachers who have a genuine love for God and kids.

Since your pool of potential teachers may be shallow, don't be overly concerned with their experience or ability. You want those who will teach children the Bible, not just merely teach the Bible. Young people will respond to those who they detect have a sincere interest in what interests them. And those who love Jesus will radiate a joy and authenticity that will more than compensate for their lack of polish or memory recall.

Martha Clarkson was like that. I never knew a woman who cared for kids the way she did. She was not all that attractive. In fact, she was noticeably overweight. But her smile and hugs drew boys and girls to her class. Martha had never been to college, and her knowledge of the Scriptures was not all that far ahead of the children, but the pastor affirmed her desire to teach. Her students affirmed her anointing.

Encourage lifetime assignments.

Teachers who view themselves as shepherds want to teach, year in and year out. The challenge motivates them.

Because they are using a spiritual gift, the investment of that gift yields a return of fulfillment, and their interest is compounded. In contrast, those who respond to the need to fill a classroom vacancy out of guilt or in response to arm-twisting tactics will likely burn out before long.

Elna Hagen epitomized the gift of teaching. Her calling in life was to teach first grade boys. And boy, did she ever. Being the mother of three sons no doubt helped, but Elna felt called by God to a lifetime of service. Sister Hagen taught me at First Assembly of God in Marysville, Washington. That was over 40 years ago, but I will never forget her. Because she was in it for the long haul, she made a personal investment in what she did. Each Sunday she brought something from home to share with her boys. I can still recall those delicious loaves of bread she baked in miniature pans. She sewed construction aprons for us complete with our names stitched on them. For every Bible verse we memorized or neighbor we brought to church, we'd receive a small hammer or a tape measure to go in the apron slots. And because Elna was a "lifer," little boys in preschool knew what they had to look forward to when they were promoted to Sister Hagen's class.

If you encourage teachers to view their call as an ongoing ministry, offer regular breaks.

Find a way to let your regular teachers have the summer quarter off. You can do this by combining classes for June, July, and August for an intergenerational experience (i.e., using vacation Bible school curriculum on a weekly basis, even though it's designed to be daily). Another approach would be to allow those to teach whose work or travel schedules are so unpredictable they can't teach during the school year, but could for several weeks in the summer.

Cap and Adele Harper have taught second graders at Crossroads Church in Concord for 15 years. They can't imagine themselves doing anything

else. But, don't ask them to teach 12 months in a row. They know they need a break to replenish their creative reservoir once summer hits. Some might think them too demanding or less than sold out. I know differently. They know their limits. I took pride in their performance for nearly a dozen years as their pastor.

Encourage your teachers to think like a shepherd.

When you pastor a church of less than 200 people, your perspective is, of necessity, that of a shepherd. You recognize that the nurture and care you provide is not limited to Sunday morning. You seize opportunities during the week to go after strays (you know who they are), carry the wounded, and individually feed the hungry. Teachers in smaller churches have that same mandate. They are most effective when they resist the temptation to define their task by the 45-minute class Sunday mornings. They take the time Monday through Saturday to send cards, plan field trips, and call people on the phone to just check in.

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**"We really need to think about an addition.
I don't even know these people."**

Believe it or not, the best way to teach your teachers to adopt this approach is to model that kind of shepherding with them. Even if you have a designated Sunday school teacher, you are still the master shepherd of those who shepherd the kids of your church. Spend time individually with them. Get to know their individual stories. Incorporate some of those stories into your sermons (with their permission, of course). Plan outings to Sunday school conventions when you go together as a group. Communicate on a regular basis with them. Affirm them often. Remind them that you are praying for them. Find your own creative way to tangibly keep each Sunday school teacher in your line of sight and thinking. You probably won't be starting a miniature sheep collection, but it's not that ba-a-a-d of an idea. **e**

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Pastors Are From Mars, Worship Leaders Are From Venus

BY TOM MCDONALD

As I travel across the country speaking at various conferences for ministers, I am often asked to step aside to hear the following:

"My pastor is so controlling . . . I feel smothered."

Or, I will hear . . .

"My worship leader is so unpredictable in front of the congregation . . . we stand too long."

It is epidemic. A chasm lies between pastors and worship leaders in many of our churches. The depth of the relational schism varies, but the pain each leader feels is, nonetheless, palpable. It seems we are talking at and not to each other.

As a career staff associate, I am concerned. Unless we address the root causes of the breakdown between pastor and worship leader—not just the symptoms of this breach—we are headed for greater attrition among our ranks and smaller churches under our care.

The personality differences between a senior pastor and a worship leader are

kaleidoscopic. The church is enhanced by the vibrant blend of personalities as long as each party is committed to the process of mentoring and submission. Kinks in the armor occur when communication collapses, causing each leader to go to his or her respective corner to lick wounds and counsel fears. The breakdown of a pastoral relationship is similar to the breakdown of a marriage.

The metaphor of a marriage relationship is in many ways a viable picture of our priestly dilemma. Interestingly, therapists and counselors have carefully scrutinized a healthy marriage relationship; relationships on a pastoral staff have not. Still, there is a correlation.

Studying the literature on marriage and applying the insights to pastoral staff relationships will aid the process of maintaining a healthy staff. One must understand that opposites attract, but afterward need to be coaxed into

obviously occurs under a backdrop of honesty. I also am committed to being proactive with my pastor, in terms of open and healthy communication. But that commitment requires vigilance amid our busy schedules—an emotional intelligence, so to speak.

Forgiveness is another prime building block of a marriage relationship. Trust is the by-product of love and time. A relationship cannot function where forgiveness and trust are vacant. Together, they form the linkage that is critical to withstanding the challenges of life's ebb and flow. And so it is with the sometime fragile relationship between senior minister and worship leader.

No relationship this side of heaven blossoms without being tested. Sheer human frailty sees to that. Given time, we will irritate each other, frustrate each other, and perhaps let each other down. This reality is as inevitable as the steady tick of the metronome. Life happens. And it is not always clean and neat.

The basic nature with which all humans contend in matters of getting along is selfishness. When something is offensive between pastor and worship leader, their first reaction may be to protect their self-interests and lash out, or in some way entertain disloyalty. Yet, two wrongs do not make a right. Matthew 18 speaks of working through, not facing off. Peacemaking with one's staff colleagues, over the long term, presupposes people skills and a soft, humble heart.

Contrition works. This cannot be overstated.

Pastors are trained in theology, but often not in the art of managing people. Church musicians may or may

Under God, the mix and match of a pulpit team can produce public chemistry and fulfilling worship.

significant. Pastors are often logical in their thinking patterns, pragmatic in their decisionmaking, and fiscally cautious. Worship leaders tend to be dreamy, out-of-the-box creative, and "a budget—what's that?"

Under God, the mix and match of a pulpit team can produce public chemistry and fulfilling worship, for preaching is linear and worship is

staying attracted by each party's individual will. Communication matters. It is one of the prime building blocks of healthy relationships, and its relevance is universal, whether in a marriage or in the ministry.

I work to keep the communication lines open and healthy in my marriage. This process involves time, energy, and a willingness to be vulnerable. All this

not be formally trained in music, but they, too, are not often trained in managing people. So here we have two energetic persons—each lacking the very skill they desperately need to co-exist. And the adversary simply goes to work.

Misunderstandings scrape the skin. Hurts fester. Bitterness is seeded in our soul. Then we rankle the offense with an evil monologue that eventuates into harsh tones and overreactions. The Bible is clear, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34).

Is it any wonder the divorce rate between senior pastors and staff pastors is so high? We need to change our old-school mentality for a 21st-century mindset and develop some relational competencies—such as mutual empathy and anger management.

Fortunately, the literature available to improve marriages can be transferred to improving relationships between pastor and worship leader. Consider the following two examples.

OVERCOMING FOUR TRAITS THAT CAN TERMINATE A MINISTRY RELATIONSHIP

In their book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages*, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott list four traits that will terminate a marriage relationship if improperly handled. They include infidelity, infertility, loss, and addiction. Let's evaluate each concept from a pastoral perspective.

Infidelity—when gossip breeds betrayal

Disloyalty hurts. When a pastor talks with a parishioner about the problems he* has encountered with the worship leader, rather than invoking Matthew 18, he makes a deposit in the termination of the relationship. Staff tenure will end where gossip and backbiting are allowed to crop up. When the worship leader takes his grievances to the band or to the singers, instead of to the Lord, prayerfully, and the pastor, respectively, a deposit to breakup the relationship is also made.

When offended, our tongues are our own worst enemies.

Infertility—when vision is barren

The Word says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). If the pastor is either lacking a godly vision or communicating the vision poorly, the staff will become discouraged and begin to murmur. Casting vision is one of the central responsibilities of the pastor. Many do

in our Christian lives determines our future. We can, like the Children of Israel, travel to the Promised Land in either 11 days or 40 years. The choice is ours.

I am amazed at how hard pastors work to preach, and yet, how cavalierly they manage staff conflict. Equally, I am amazed at how easy it is for a worship leader to teach a new song, and then spoil the atmosphere with gossip after the service.

No relationship this side of heaven blossoms without being tested. Sheer human frailty sees to that.

not take this motivational role seriously. Passion, enthusiasm, and the desire to sacrifice or work hard are all related to internalized vision. Without a burning purpose in a worship leader's soul, the temptation is to kick back. In that mindset, too much time for carnality exists.

A minister can also affect the creativity of the worship leader—rendering the associate infertile—if there is not an atmosphere on staff to celebrate new ideas. Allowing mistakes and experiments, within reason and without harsh retribution, is a part of the dynamism of a healthy, progressive staff.

Creativity is a two-way street. Equally relevant is the expectation on the part of the pastor that the worship leader will avoid ruts and routines in his public presentations. Pastors have a legitimate right to expect their worship leaders to be learning new songs, reading new books, and practicing their instrument of choice to stay on the cutting edge. Laziness and poor work habits reduce creativity and inject an intellectual infertility into church musicians.

Loss—when hurts are not healed

This category is especially sensitive. For the way we process any act of betrayal

Loss refers to any hurt that is not forgiven—according to the scriptural reference. Healthy relations between pastor and worship leader can hinge on this concept alone.

Addiction—when workaholicism dominates

Addictions are idols which, when allowed to take root in our lives, blur our focus on Jesus. Addictions rob us of perspective and Christlike conduct. Clearly, there is no room for substance abuse or pornography in the ministry. But what about a more subtle form of addiction—workaholicism?

All pastors—senior and staff associate—are subject to the rigors of the parish. There is always more to do; another issue to resolve. Ruthlessly choosing the task of ministry over family time, week after week, leads to personal burnout, rebellion in the parsonage, and poor morale on the staff.

THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

In his book, *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman discloses one of life's rare secrets. If you and I can learn to communicate with our spouse, pastor, or colleague in the way they perceive love, and not in the way we do, we

will greatly enhance our chances of communicating clearly and effectively. Problems in relationships occur when the filters of personal experience and worldview dominate the brain of the listener during a conversation, thus hindering one's ability to carefully pay attention. By speaking in the other's love language we cut through filters and touch the heart of the individual.

Chapman's research has defined five primary love languages; the first four have direct application to ministerial relationships. They are:

- 1) words of affirmation.
- 2) quality time.
- 3) receiving gifts.
- 4) acts of service.
- 5) physical touch.

If your colleague responds to words of affirmation, call him at home after catching him doing well and give congratulations. Or generate a handwritten note. Note-card writing is a

staple in my bag of tricks.

If quality time is the language that speaks, take car rides together, even if the destination is a stop on a list of errands (unless the relationship on staff is male/female).

Receiving gifts and offering acts of service are more obvious categories of interaction. Assisting your colleague in fulfilling a project when he doesn't expect your assistance—as an act of service—is both gratifying and affirming. If gift giving works, take your pastor or worship leader to lunch occasionally; or, when in a Christian bookstore, pick up two copies of a book instead of one. Little gifts can speak into a relationship with the dynamism of big gifts.

Pastor, what is the love language of your worship leader? How can you script your criticisms of his work to challenge behavior without wounding the spirit? I am reminded of the wise counsel of the coach who said,

"Always lead with words of encouragement before offering words of instruction."

Worship leader, how can you make your interactions with your pastor times of blessing and not cursing? How can you encourage your leader—and build rapport—so you, like Aaron and Hur, can hold up the arms of "Moses"?

I encourage every pastor and worship leader to purchase the books I have mentioned and study the inherent concepts with an eye toward improving your relationship.

Think about what is at stake. **e**

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**No gender preference is implied by the use of the masculine pronoun for pastor and worship leader.*

WHEN THE PASTOR IS . . .	THE WORSHIP LEADER FEEL . . .	REFERENCE (NIV)
Unappreciative	Devalued	1 Thessalonians 5:15,18—"Always try to be kind to each other . . . give thanks in all circumstances."
Controlling	Denigrated	1 Peter 5:2,3—"Be shepherds of God's flock . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you."
Yelling	Humiliated	Proverbs 15:1—"A harsh word stirs up anger."
A gossip	Betrayed	Proverbs 11:13—"A gossip betrays a confidence."
Communicating poorly	Disenfranchised	John 12:35—"The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."
WHEN THE WORSHIP LEADER IS . . .	THE PASTOR FEELS . . .	REFERENCE (NIV)
Lazy	Cheated	Proverbs 18:9—"One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys."
Grandstanding	Embarrassed	Proverbs 11:2—"When pride comes, then comes disgrace."
Fiscally irresponsible	Nervous	Luke 16:11—"If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"
Usurping pastoral authority	Undermined	Hebrews 13:17—"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority . . . so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."
A gossip	Betrayed	Proverbs 16:28—"A gossip separates close friends."

THE "OPENNESS OF GOD"

(continued from page 137)

movement. As a generation of young Arminian scholars has come to maturity and other non-Calvinistic evangelicals, like the Pentecostals, have become numerous and influential, there has been a sharper polemic from some Calvinistic theologians that seems to have been exacerbated by the openness dialogue. David Wells recently wrote that openness theism is a combination of Arminianism and a view of God impacted by process theology.²² His colleague, John Jefferson Davis, also states that openness theology "takes to the limit tendencies expressed in the Arminian and process traditions."²³ From the Arminian side, one might just as easily point out that what Calvinists perceive as openness exaggeration of Arminian tendencies is a reaction to tendencies toward determinism and fatalism in hegemonic Calvinism. It is no more appropriate to yoke openness theology to Arminianism than to yoke fatalistic determinism to Calvinism. An irenic and honest exploration of both streams of evangelical theology with a view to scriptural fidelity is essential.²⁴

CONCLUSION

This brief study has demonstrated that openness theology is not a legitimate or necessary extension of historic Arminianism with which the Pentecostal tradition has many affinities. Neither is it reflective of the Calvinistic tradition nor a necessary response to that tradition. Rather, openness theology appears to be another tangent in the ongoing quest to reconcile divine providence and human freedom, with a little stimulation from process theology.

The beliefs of openness advocates are probably not so deviant as to require their exclusion from Christian fellowship. They seem genuinely concerned to preach the God of the Bible and make vibrant Christian disciples.

Nonetheless, it does seem clear that openness theologians lack adequate scriptural grounding and are outside the theological mainstream with regard to God's omniscience and providence. Biblically, the future appears to be less open than they propose. **E**

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The Multicultural Classroom

B Y D A V I D J . M O O R E

To understand how to communicate effectively as a teacher in a multicultural classroom, it is necessary to take a look at the components. If the teacher is of predominantly middle-class American background, it is helpful to consider students from two distinct perspectives. First, in a broad sense, no two individuals share the same culture. Age, gender, ethnic origin, socio-economic class, and exceptionality (physical or mental uniqueness) are just a few determinants of individual identity. In a more narrow sense, however, there are common values that distinguish middle-class American culture (MCAC) from most others. It is here that teachers most need to be aware of potential cross-cultural communication problems.

If we look at six basic qualities of human nature and how these qualities are expressed through middle-class American values as opposed to most

Many other cultures, most notably Hispanic, place more value on relationship nurturing and expect longer exposure time. To them, you can't discuss content (and you certainly can't trust the deliverer of the content) until you have had adequate (longer) exposure time.

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Allow more time for informalities and emphasize relational aspects of course material.

2. Self-esteem. MCAC defines self-esteem as individual achievement. Independent thinking and self-reliance are viewed as necessary attitudes toward the development of healthy self-esteem.

For many groups, especially Asians, self-esteem is not a definable quality because one's sense of personal identity is expressed through the family. When one individual achieves, he or she does so as an integral part of the family or

3. Ideal performance. Someone who is active and always busy is admired in MCAC because "idle time is the devil's workshop."

Among many other groups "being" (who you are and who you are connected to) is more important than "doing." Reflection and meditation are admirable qualities. Someone who is always busy must have trouble managing his or her life, or worse yet, must constantly be getting himself or herself into trouble that requires extra activity to get out of it.

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Don't talk about how busy you've been during the past week.

4. Reasoning (Logic). In MCAC culture, thinking tends to be linear, moving directly from one point to the next and building sequential frames of reference along the way until a conclusion is reached on a matter. Thinking also tends to emphasize practicality. If it works, it can be duplicated and will work in other contexts, be it physical structures or methods of imparting information.

Many other groups reach conclusions more from an aesthetic perspective. Whether it works within a specific context is not as important as how it looks and how it feels. And conclusions tend to be reached more from an eclectic approach (some call it "circular thinking"). The key is that what appears to be logical to a MCAC thinker may be quite illogical to a person of another cultural background, and vice versa.

One noticeable difference in teaching is that in most MCAC settings, the Scripture

Genuine love and concern for each person created in God's image cover a multitude of cultural missteps.

other cultures, we can readily see how these problems can affect teaching in a multicultural classroom.

1. Exposure time. Middle-class American culture values "redeeming the time," "getting to the point," and making sure planned material is covered. For this reason, the informal exposure time, necessary but brief, consists of little more than, "Hi, how are you today?"

group, not as an individual. There is no such thing as an empty-nest syndrome. Rather, the nest keeps enlarging, with culturally understood interdependencies and mutual responsibilities constantly at work to fulfill group obligations.

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Emphasize identity of the believer through the body of Christ and de-emphasize role of individual performance.

is given first, then stories and illustration are brought in to substantiate the spiritual truth. Whereas among many cultures of the world the scriptural application will come after a story or illustration is given.

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Use less abstract terms and be more intentional about connecting everyday experiences with scriptural truth.

5. Worldview. Those conditioned by MCAC tend to have a progressive worldview, in the sense that no natural problem is too difficult to overcome, no mountain too big that it cannot be moved for the sake of progress, and change is the order of the day.

Not so for people with a more naturalistic view of the world. To them, progress is often at the expense of trampling sacred traditions. The preferred attitude is respect for and acceptance of what is, rather than change. In this way, accepting one's lot in life and knowing how to deal with it properly is valued above seeking to change one's lot in life and overcoming perceived injustices to improve one's lot.

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Emphasize the unique gifts God has given to each individual and how these gifts can be used to contribute

to the smooth functioning of the body of Christ.

6. Maintenance of social order. To most people of MCAC, all of life's decisions are governed by persuasion. If we are persuaded to buy a car, we buy one. If we are persuaded to make a decision for Christ, we make one. If we are persuaded that eating junk food is not healthy, we don't eat it. So when other people behave in ways or believe in principles that are obviously not to our standards, we seek to persuade them of the correctness of our way of thinking.

Many people with different cultural backgrounds don't put much stock in persuasion. They may consider it to be frivolous. Their confidence is more in the authority a person has in a given situation (i.e., a grandfather, a wise elder who is older than 70 years of age, a pastor, or a civic leader).

Suggestion for multicultural classroom: Don't try to convince from evidence or offer several differing points of view about a passage of Scripture. This would be more appropriate in a one-to-one setting with a student who shows unusual curiosity. Rather, emphasize the authority of the

Word of God and the authoritative statements of Jesus.

These are just a few of the many ways one's cultural background conditions one's perceptions regarding attitudes and expected behavior. Above all, it is critical that teachers in a multicultural classroom exercise compassion and spiritual sensitivity. Genuine love and concern for each person created in God's image cover a multitude of cultural missteps. Teachers will want to get acquainted with their students as intimately as possible so they can present themselves in a way the students will see that this spiritual sensitivity is more than lip service. A wise teacher will take to heart the words of Paul, "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:7,8, NIV). **e**

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Three Strategies for Investing in Uncertain Times

B Y R A N D A L L K . B A R T O N

The speculative investment bubble of the 1990s has burst, leaving people wondering what went wrong. Unfortunately, the problem was not overvaluations of high-tech stock, Ponzi schemes that promised 1- to 2-percent return per month with no risk of principal, or the “risk free” offshore hedge funds, which often go farther south than the Caribbean. These are only symptoms of a root struggle. The true problem is that Christians have been convinced to store up their treasures in the wrong places.

STRATEGY #1: MITIGATE RISK

In Matthew 6:19, Jesus warned, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”*

In light of Christ’s admonition, the first strategy is to realize that everything we accumulate on earth is at risk. Speculative investments are made because of greed. Proverbs 28:20 says, “A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.” People are sold an illusion that high returns can be achieved without high risk. How can you mitigate risk?

Diversification by asset class

This is probably the most widely practiced form of diversification. It combines different classes of assets (such as stocks, bonds, international, and cash) into a single portfolio. Different asset classes rise and fall in value independently of one another, so combining them reduces the volatility of the entire fund.

Diversification by investment style

Many investment managers stop short at diversification by asset class. Most people don’t know that many funds are generally single-style in design, and those styles substantially affect performance. However, if you were able to combine in one fund multiple managers who practice complementary investment styles (whether it’s growth, value, market-oriented, or small cap), the negative impact is softened when a style goes out of favor.

Diversification by manager

Not all fund managers are created equal. Even within particular styles of managing, the strategies and techniques differ. If you put all your eggs in one manager’s basket and he drops the basket, you’ve got a mess. By adding multiple managers to your investment portfolio, when combined with multiasset, multi-investment styles, you will substantially reduce risk and volatility while building long-term growth.

By providing three levels of diversification, you reduce volatility and mitigate risk in your investment portfolio and maximize return relative to the risk you have taken.

STRATEGY #2: ETERNAL INVESTING

In Matthew 6:20, Jesus provided sound investment advice for people of all ages, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Jesus didn’t suggest that we shouldn’t save for retirement. Jesus didn’t condemn wealth. He simply

stated that part of our strategy must include Kingdom investing. Sending part of our wealth on ahead, where it will be protected from current market volatility, can multiply without risk and will be waiting for us after retirement. What type of eternal investing should we consider?

The most difficult part of eternal investing is getting started. Fortunately, God’s Word provides a strategy for every person to get started, regardless of wealth, position, or resources. In the Bible, the tithe (a tenth part) was the beginning of all eternal investing. The old covenant principle of the tithe is a timeless biblical truth. In the new covenant, every example of giving goes beyond the tithe, while no example falls short of it. Once a believer has discovered that God truly does “throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing” (Malachi 3:10) when we tithe, we realize it is only the beginning point of eternal investing.

One afternoon while I was walking on the beach with a nationally prominent layman of substantial means, he exclaimed to me, “I have discovered truth. Since the tithe belongs to God, I have yet to start giving until I get beyond the tithe.” This wealthy businessman, an heir to substantial stock in a Fortune 500 company, understood that tithing is simply the method by which we open up our eternal investment account so we can begin making additional deposits, or “offerings.” Additional deposits include missions giving, benevolence giving, capital campaigns for a church building fund, a college or university project, district

campgrounds, or other parachurch ministries.

While offerings may be in response to a special emotional appeal, the best investment strategy is a planned investment strategy. Just like with our earthly retirement planning, our eternal investment planning should include, each year, an ever higher percentage of our income being allocated to offerings above our tithe.

As Randy Alcorn stated in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving." Every year, you need to pray and plan to raise your standard of giving and thereby increase your eternal investment account.

Eternal investing is not limited to giving it away. Eternal investing requires us to decide what to do not only with our income, but also with our possessions. Proverbs 3:9 tells us to honor the Lord with our possessions. Many faithful stewards have found wonderful opportunities through what is called *planned giving*. Traditional investment dollars are turned into planned giving dollars through the use of charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities, stewardship trusts, donor advised funds, and even investing in loan fund certificates that pay fixed income and are used to build churches. While rules that govern these situations are complex, they provide wonderful opportunities to view even our earthly investments with an eternal perspective.

STRATEGY #3: BALANCING YOUR PORTFOLIO

Times change. When we are younger, we have a longer time horizon and can afford more risk in equities. The older we are, the more we should allocate to fixed income. Our investment portfolio can get out of balance and have too much equity in a bull market and too little equity in a bear market. Such factors require that we periodically change our investment allocation.

One of the most difficult questions is balancing our earthy investment allocation (Strategy #1) with our heavenly investment allocation (Strategy #2). Thankfully, the Word of God provides an allocation test. In Luke 12:16–21, Jesus shared a parable about a person who had his investment portfolio out of balance:

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

The test is straightforward. Are you as rich toward the things of God as you are toward yourself? The application of

this test will vary with each of us.

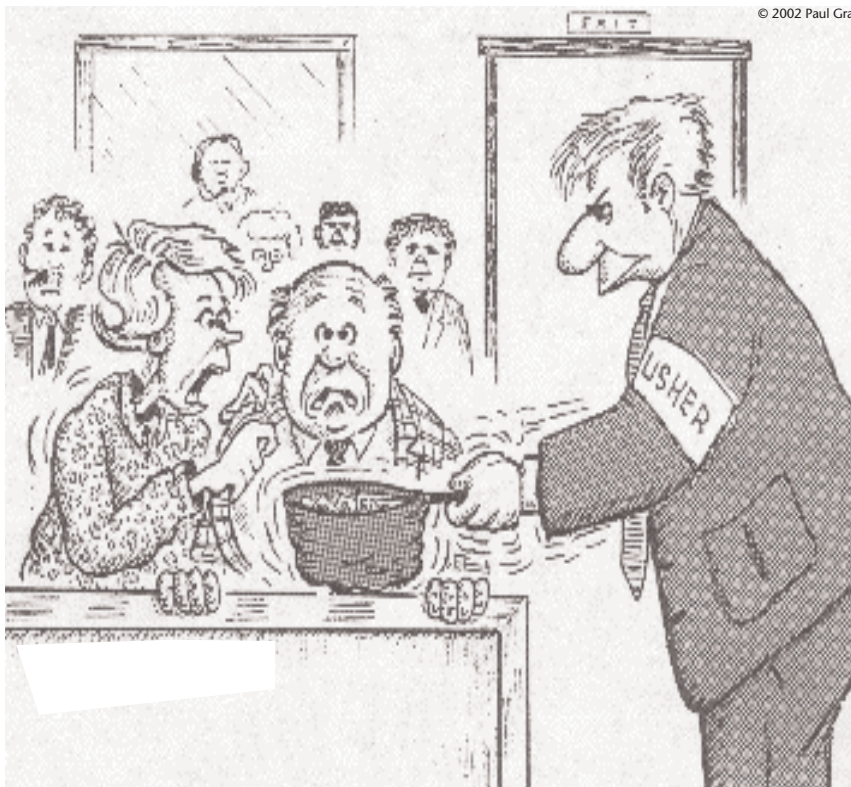
- For the wealthy businessman in Luke 12, it meant that he should have stopped building bigger barns.
- For the discerning listener in Matthew 6:19–21, it meant storing up treasures in heaven.
- For the person with two tunics in Luke 3:10,11, it meant giving one.
- For Zacchaeus, it meant giving away half of what he had (Luke 19:1–9).

Conclusion

Being rich toward God means something different for each person who has an encounter with Christ. For all of us, it suggests that we stop chasing the treasures of highly speculative earthly returns and send it ahead into an investment vehicle in heaven, where the market is always bullish, where there is no volatility, and the returns are always positive. **e**

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**Scripture references are from the New International Version.*



"He can smell fear, don't make eye contact."



No 'Half Christian': The Amazing Life and Legacy of John Wesley¹

BY WILLIAM P. FARLEY

On April 2, 1739, a thin, 5-foot, 2-inch, 36-year-old Anglican priest mounted a small eminence in a brickyard just outside Bristol, England. An Oxford graduate, he had been trained to do all things with decency and order. Decency did not include field preaching. But three things motivated him to break with convention: God had been blessing the field preaching of his friend, George Whitefield; most churches had shut their doors to him; and he was consumed by a passion to reach the lost.

The weather was probably cold and rainy. The sermon was most likely long and hard to hear, but 3,000 came to listen, and many were converted. "As soon as he got up to the stand," wrote one listener, "he stroked back his hair and turned his face toward where I stood, and I thought he fixed his eyes on me. When he spoke, I thought his whole message was aimed at me. When he finished I said, 'This man can tell the secrets of my heart.'"²

And so began the long, fruitful, amazingly productive ministry of John Wesley (1703–91). From his earliest days, he had made up his mind to never be what he called "half a Christian." He wasn't. During the next 52 years, he rode over 250,000 miles by horseback (averaging 4 hours per day, 7 days per week in the saddle). He preached an average of 2 sermons per day, answered immense correspondence, wrote a complete commentary on the Bible, edited and published a Christian library in 50 volumes, read omnivorously, wrote book reviews on contemporary literature, trained hundreds of men for the ministry, and gave pastoral oversight to an exploding

parachurch organization that would later become the Methodist church.

Of him J.C. Ryle wrote: "Those only who read the Journals he kept for 50 years can have any idea of the immense amount of work that he got through. Never perhaps did any man have so many irons in the fire at one time, and yet succeed in keeping so many hot . . . He wrote as if he had nothing to do but write, preached as if he had nothing to do but preach, and administered as if he had nothing to do but administer."³

Of himself, Wesley wrote: "Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry, because I never undertake more work than I can go through with perfect calmness of spirit."⁴ This rest, coupled with his intense singleness of purpose, was the secret of his spiritual productivity.

EARLY YEARS

Wesley's upbringing had a great deal to do with his usefulness to God. Born in 1703, in Epworth, England, to Samuel and Susannah Wesley, John was the 15th of 19 children. His father, the village Episcopal priest, came from sturdy Puritan stock. John's grandfather and great-grandfather suffered rejection during the same persecution that imprisoned John Bunyan. Our hero grew up with a mixture of Spartan discipline and tender affection—the same crucible that produced many of history's great Christian leaders.

He attended Oxford and was ordained in his 20s. At age 27, he and his brother, Charles, organized a group of students to encourage one another in mutual growth in holiness. They visited prisons, prayed constantly, gave alms to the poor, and met for prayer and Bible

study. The other students derisively nicknamed them the "holy club."

Despite these exertions, he was still not converted. Depending on his good works, good intentions, and personal efforts for God's acceptance, he knew from intimate experience the agony of bondage to the Law. He had zeal without knowledge, and suffered incessant guilt, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of death.

At age 32, he sailed with his brother to the state of Georgia in the United States to evangelize the Indians. En route the ship passed through a terrible storm. Huge waves crashed over the deck, even shattering the main mast from its base. Wesley thought he was going to die. He was terrified because he lacked peace with God.

He couldn't help contrasting his panic with the peace and calm of 26 Moravian missionaries also onboard. Wesley didn't possess the new birth that assured and calmed them, but he wanted what they had. After 2 years of fruitless missionary efforts in Georgia, he returned to England convinced that he needed conversion just as much as the Indians he was seeking to evangelize.

Age 35, and an ordained Anglican priest for over 10 years, he went to an evening meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. "Someone was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans," he later wrote. "About a quarter before 9, while he (Luther) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ; Christ alone, for salvation . . . He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death."⁵

Wesley was a new man. The longer

and deeper one has been in bondage to self-justification, the greater the joy of salvation by faith alone. Within a few months he preached the Bristol sermon with which this article opened and launched, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a 52-year ministry that changed the course of English history.

THE MAN

God gave John Wesley several unique qualities that deserve consideration. First, he placed a tremendous emphasis on preaching. He saw clearly that this was the first work of any servant of God. Sunday, April 8, 1739, is illustrative. At 7 a.m. he preached to about 1,000 in Bristol. A little later in the day he preached to 1,500 in the open air on the top of Hannam-Mount in Kingswood. Still later that day he preached to 5,000 at Rose-Green. Two days later he went to Bath where he preached three more times to similar crowds. All this with no microphones, shouting into the wind and elements in the open air.⁶

Second, God's power was with him. Despite the fact he was an average preacher, it was not unusual for people to be tremendously affected by the Holy Spirit's convicting presence. The following entry in his diary was typical: "Many of those that heard began to call upon God with strong cries and tears. Some sank down, and there remained no strength in them."⁷ Neither Wesley's gifts nor personality explain these results. He depended completely on God's supernatural anointing, and God dispensed it liberally throughout his ministry.

Third, he was courageous. He feared no man. God's anointing brought tremendous persecution. Crowds were often difficult and violent. "As soon as we went out," Wesley said of one place, "we were saluted, as usual, with jeers and a few stones and pieces of dirt."

"Wesley and his friends," wrote one biographer, "were often attacked by gangs armed with clubs, whips, bricks, stink bombs, wildfire, or rotten eggs. Sometimes bulls were driven through the audience or horsemen overrode

them."⁸ In the face of this terrific opposition Wesley pressed forward, always seeking first the kingdom of God—like Paul, fearless. (Notice the contrast between the new Wesley and the fear-filled unbeliever in the Atlantic storm.)

Wesley's boldness also appeared early in his ministry when he returned to his hometown. When the village rector who had replaced his deceased father refused to let him preach because of his enthusiasm, he mounted his father's grave that was next to the church and preached to a substantial crowd in the open air with momentous results.

Fourth, he was always a loyal Anglican. He did not want to start a new church. Although thousands were saved through his ministry, he ran it as a parachurch organization within the Church of England. This was a weakness. He refused to recognize what was really happening—God was calling out a people for himself from within a dead church structure. After his death, his followers broke away from Anglicanism and formed the Methodist church. It numbers over 9.7 million members today, but for the most part, the anointing of Wesley is gone.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF WESLEY

What can we learn from the life of John Wesley? First, the hand that rocks the cradle often rules the world. John and Charles Wesley owed most of what they were to their mother's diligent training, high moral expectations, pious example, and hours of spiritual instruction. As she toiled to raise 19 children, I am sure she often lost sight of the truth that God was using her in a special way, but He was.

Second, God sometimes retains men in the misery of unbelief to amplify the joy and privilege of conversion when it finally comes. Like Luther before him, and Spurgeon after him, when Wesley saw justification by faith alone, the relief and joy overwhelmed him. It was the defining moment of his life, and his preaching continually related back to the reality of his joy in the free and sovereign grace of God.

Third, truth is unfashionable to the degree that God's power impels it. Wesley knew persecution in direct proportion to the power of God resting on him. We have little persecution because we have little power. Most of us are no threat to the devil. But if God gave us Wesley's spiritual power—the power to shake this nation—all hell would break out against us, just as it did for John.

Fourth, from John's life we learn the priority of preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. God shook England through the dynamic of His Word proclaimed by John with passion and conviction. This has always been God's pattern, and it will never change. There are no great awakenings without God-empowered preaching.

Fifth, Wesley's life reminds us there is a place for the unmarried minister in God's kingdom. Wesley married Molly Vazeille at age 47. It was a mistake, and though they never divorced, eventually they separated. His calling was probably not compatible with marriage. He was always on the road, constantly busy, and single-mindedly committed to the expansion of God's kingdom. He could not give the time and attention to a wife that marriage vows demand. Quite possibly God had called John to the single life. **E**

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Tomorrow's Leaders Are on Our Campuses Today

BY ROBERT H. SPENCE

As the fall semester begins, Assemblies of God college campuses are once more centers of enthusiastic student activity. With increasing numbers of nontraditional programs, enrollment may exceed all previous records. Unquestionably, the ministries of Christian higher education offer the church some of the greatest opportunities in this hour.

These opportunities are best seen in the lives of individual students. Often living away from home and family for the first time, they respond positively to affirmation and assistance as they seek to combine academic preparation with spiritual development to fulfill God's will for their lives. The investment made in their lives will reap great dividends as they mature and assume

are deeply committed spiritually because of the vision and dedicated labor of our early leaders. Each of our existing schools can trace its beginnings to men and women who understood the importance of discipleship training and leadership preparation. Convinced that the church had a responsibility to render that service, they dedicated themselves to that task.

Significantly, early Pentecostal leaders recognized a need for schools that would affirm faith and the full gospel experience of their future pastors. Colleges and Bible institutes in existence at the time were prone to be adversarial. Even as a fledgling Movement, Pentecostal believers wisely involved the church in the training programs.

included those who did not adhere to the faith of the college founders. Difficulty in recruiting qualified instructors with Christian commitments eventually led administrators to decide that only professors of Bible should embrace the faith.

A small concession or a minor exception would seem insignificant until compounded by years of compromise. Seemingly unimportant adjustments over time resulted in changes of spiritual and philosophical direction. Consequently, many of the colleges that were in the forefront of spiritual leadership during colonial times, today bear no resemblance to their former doctrinal position.

Unfortunately, such changes have not been restricted to past history. The news sections of religious journals will occasionally include a story regarding a current conflict between a church-related college and its sponsoring church. Occasionally, the institution is sufficiently well-known that the secular press report the story.

A few lines of type in a newspaper or magazine or a few seconds on the evening television news cannot begin to tell the whole story. Sadly, the public announcement is often the culmination of a series of events extending over a period of years, even decades.

A visit to any Assemblies of God campus will offer an opportunity to view dedicated Christian students who are serving the Lord passionately, and conscientiously preparing for places of service in this world. Participate in chapel services conducted on every campus and you will find the same vibrancy of worship and praise as you

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positions of leadership. They are tomorrow's leaders and they are on our campuses today.

The Assemblies of God supports a system of colleges, strategically located in various parts of the nation, with general as well as specialized programs to address the needs of the national church. With each institution working with a well-defined mission statement, our 20 endorsed colleges, institutes, and seminary focus primarily on preparing future ministerial and lay leaders.

Thousands of students will study this year with highly qualified faculty who

Postsecondary education—higher education—in the United States historically had a very close association with the church. Beginning with Harvard, established in 1636 and continuing through colonial times, colleges were often established with the primary purpose of preparing ministers. The faculties of those early colleges were predominantly comprised of ordained clergy.

With the passing of time, these early colleges expanded their programs, and the priority of ministerial training diminished. Expanding student bodies

will find in churches across our nation. The Word of God is proclaimed under the anointing of the Holy Spirit with clarity and conviction. Altar services provide opportunities for life-changing decisions and lifelong commitments.

The questions sometimes asked include: "Can we be assured that this congruency of purpose and mission can be maintained between our colleges and our Fellowship?" "What safeguards are there to ensure continued dedication to our Pentecostal heritage?" "Are our future leaders receiving the preparation they need?"

Legal documents, such as articles of incorporation, state charters, constitutions, and bylaws, are vital and important. However, even the best-written and most strongly worded documents can be revised or changed over time. History and tradition are important, but new generations arise who lack the personal experiences of their predecessors and sometimes do not understand why certain declarations are emphasized.

The Bible records the sobering description of changes that can occur with succeeding generations in this manner: "The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel . . . After that whole generation had gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:7,10).

Should the Lord delay His coming indefinitely, Assemblies of God colleges will continue to be firm in their commitments to our doctrine, provided our schools and our constituency continue to work closely together. Members of boards of trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students need the involvement of pastors and local churches in maintaining a clear focus of mission and ministry. Above all else, we must hold firm in our insistence that those who staff our schools know the Lord and what He has done among us. The teaching gifts exercised on our

campuses daily are a gift to the entire body of Christ, but they must be seen as a gift from the Lord and not merely of human origin.

At the beginning of a new school year, pastors are encouraged to consider these suggestions to strengthen the tie between our colleges and our churches:

1. Visit one or more of our campuses and become personally acquainted with administrators and faculty members. Arrange for participation of church youth groups in the College Day programs all of our schools sponsor.

2. Invite representatives of our schools to visit the local church to bring up-to-date reports on the work of God's Spirit in the lives of students. Student teams with special preparation in music, drama, and personal evangelism are available to assist the local church and are eager to partner with youth groups and outreach ministries. Faculty are available for teaching and ministry engagements.

3. Provide opportunities for internships and mentoring for students who sense God's call on their lives for full-time service in the church. Arrangements can be made for this

time of practical experience to earn credit toward a degree. The New Testament pattern included young ministers learning and developing under the guidance of more experienced men of God. Excellent examples of mentoring are seen as Paul worked with Timothy and Titus.

4. Include financial support for our schools in the total missions budget of the local church. Taxpayers contribute to the support of secular universities, but our schools depend on the voluntary gifts from those who believe in their mission.

The thousands of students enrolled in our colleges this fall, as well as the schools themselves, are assets of inestimable value to the kingdom of God and to our Fellowship. Untold numbers of faithful servants of God have prayed diligently and have given sacrificially to enable us to serve students as we do today. It is imperative for us to be good stewards of these resources that have been entrusted to us. **E**

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"Fortunately, the Almighty is compassionate, kind, and hopefully tone deaf."

S E R M O N S E E D S



CALLED TO TEACH

Matthew 28:19

INTRODUCTION:

Our text states, “Make disciples of all nations” (NIV). It is not enough to get people saved; we must teach them how to live for Christ. Some believers backslide and even join false religions because they have never received proper teaching.

Being a teacher is not an easy calling, but it is a rewarding one. In the New Testament, the word *go* appears 1,200 times, *teach* 216 times, and *preach* 175 times.

MESSAGE:

1. Purpose of teaching.

- To evangelize (Mark 16:15). This is the main reason for the church or Sunday school—to get people saved.
- To educate (Matthew 28:19,20). As a teacher you must:
 - know the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15).
 - be a man or woman of the Book (Joshua 1:8).
 - be ready to give scriptural answers to questions (1 Peter 3:15).
- To edify (Ephesians 4:12). You must build people up in the faith, encourage them, help them to live for God.

- To enthuse (Acts 17:6). Early Christians had a contagious enthusiasm. They made a difference in their communities. Pupils will be enthused if the teacher is. As early Christians changed their world, we may change ours.

2. Planning in teaching.

- Plan with prayer (Matthew 6:6). A person who does not pray daily should not teach others. Learn to “wait upon the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31).
- Plan with purpose (Jeremiah 33:3). Ask God to do great things for your pupils and expect Him to do great things.
- Plan with passion (Acts 20:31). For 3 years Paul shed tears for people. Be concerned enough to pray over each member of your class until all are saved.

3. Preaching and teaching.

- Be simple (1 Corinthians 1:23). Preach Christ. Do not waste time discussing other churches, politics, or such things. Teach about Jesus, and the pupils will be drawn to Him.
- Be scriptural (Romans 10:17). Hearing the Word produces faith. Fill your message with the Bible.

- Be spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:4). Paul’s speaking was with the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each lesson may be anointed with the Spirit.
- Be sure (2 Timothy 1:12). Be able to say, “Thus saith the Lord,” and don’t compromise. The teaching of the truth makes some hearers glad and some mad.

4. Problems of teaching. There will be various types of persons in your class. You must meet the needs of all.

- The saint—feed him.
- The sinner—save him.
- The self-righteous—change him.
- The sorrowing—comfort him.
- The simple—understand him.
- The student—teach him.
- The sensual—warn him.

CONCLUSION:

Teach every lesson as though it were your last. Some may never hear you teach again, so do your best. Seek to get people saved. Aim to make each member of the class a soul winner.

—Croft M. Pentz, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania
Adapted from Advance.

KINGDOM MINISTRY

Luke 4:18,19

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus came to preach the gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43). If accepted, the gospel will change people, give them potential, and make an eternal difference in their lives.

MESSAGE:

1. Jesus came to preach to the poor (verse 18).

- The identity of the poor. They:
 - helpless.
 - hopeless.
 - humble.
- The potential of the poor. They can walk in:
 - liberty.

- light.
- love.

2. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted (verse 18).

- The brokenhearted are broken by:
 - sadness.
 - Satan.
 - selfishness.
- Mended hearts have:
 - peace.
 - power.
 - purpose.

3. Jesus came to proclaim freedom (verses 18,19).

- Freedom from captivity by:
 - false religion.
 - spiritual blindness.

- spiritual oppression.
- Freedom to serve God in His power. In the Year of Jubilee, which occurred every 50th year, all debts were canceled, slaves were given freedom, and land was returned to families.
 - A new master—God’s Savior.
 - A new ministry—God’s calling.
 - A new method—God’s power.
 - A new motivation—God’s love.

CONCLUSION:

God’s kingdom gospel makes a powerful and eternal change in each person’s life. In God’s kingdom you may receive spiritual riches, a mended heart, and divine deliverance.

—Jerry Newswander, Taylor, Michigan

S E R M O N S E E D S

GET READY FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS

Joel 2:12–29

Theme: Being prepared to receive and then respond appropriately to God's blessings.

INTRODUCTION:

The blessings of God is a common expression. But how do you define the blessings of God? For some, it relates predominately to earthly things and material possessions. For others, it means a particular type of worship service. More appropriately defined, the foundation for the blessings of God is in the restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You must not restrict your understanding of the blessings of God to one or a few segments of life.

MESSAGE:

1. Recognition.

- a. Of personal need (Joel 1:4,13,14; 2:1,12,13,15–17).
 - (1) A deterrent to receiving the blessings of God is to assume you have no spiritual need.
 - (2) The rich young ruler (Luke 18):
 - (a) kept the law of Moses
 - (b) was not willing to acknowledge his greed.
 - (3) With recognition of need comes repentance.
 - (4) When we find fault in others, we do not allow the Holy Spirit to reveal our need.
- b. Of divine sovereignty (Joel 2:18–20).
 - (1) The eternal plan of Almighty God cannot be altered by man.
 - (2) He has given us His name (Isaiah 48:11).
 - (a) Moses. "The Lord shall fight for you" (Exodus 14:14).
 - (b) David. "When thou hearest the sound of a going [marching, military term] in the tops

of the mulberry trees . . . for then shall the Lord go out before thee" (2 Samuel 5:24).

- (c) "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17).
 - c. Of unfailing promises (Joel 2:21–27).
 - (1) The major emphasis is restoration.
 - (2) Thirty-two thousand promises in Scripture.
 - (3) Balaam's word to King Balak (Numbers 23:19).
 - d. The first step to the blessings of God is to recognize personal need, God's sovereignty, and the certainty of His promises.
- #### 2. Requirements.
- a. The blessings of God cannot be purchased, yet there are requirements in order to receive them.
 - b. The promises of God's blessings are conditional. God who freely gives what is not deserved and cannot be earned has set forth the parameters by which His blessings are received.
 - c. Widow gathered empty vessels and from one jar of oil filled all vessels and paid her debt (2 Kings 4:1–7).
 - d. Two specific items:
 - (1) Faith.
 - (a) Faith must be in God, and He will care for the outcome. Be careful not to focus on results.
 - (b) Hebrews 11:6.
 - (2) Obedience.
 - (a) Often a premarriage and postmarriage requirement.
 - (b) Raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Roll away stone (pre); remove the grave clothes (post).
 - e. Couple faith with obedience. One without the other is incomplete/

insufficient to receive His blessings.

3. Response.

- a. God is a God of purpose. His blessings are for our benefit and His glory.
- b. Two major responses come into focus:
 - (1) Willingness to change.
 - (a) The old man must be put off and new man put on.
 - (b) "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).
 - (c) Change from victim mentality to a victor.
 - (2) Ready to accept responsibility.
 - (a) God's blessings are not for selfish enjoyment.
 - (b) To whom "much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). God's blessings do not mean that you are superior to others.
- c. Response to God's purpose is the factor in determining the quality/degree of blessing you receive.
 - (1) Material blessing.
 - (2) Ministry gifts.
 - (3) Spiritual blessings.
- d. God's resource is unlimited, unequalled, and unfailing.

CONCLUSION:

First, come before Him in soul-searching and repentance. Keep an open, honest heart before the Lord. Further, you receive what you expect in faith. Faith/obedience will ensure God's blessings. Finally, be willing to change. Be willing to accept the responsibility of sharing Christ's love and goodness. Let's get ready for God's blessings.

—H. Maurice Lednický
Springfield, Missouri

SHIPWRECKED LIVES

1 Timothy 1:19

INTRODUCTION:

The Bible records these failures so they may be a warning to all of us.

MESSAGE:

1. The shipwreck of Cain

(Genesis 4:3–7).

A lack of faith in God brings ruin (Hebrews 11:4–6; Luke 17:5).

2. The shipwreck of Lot

(Genesis 19:15–38).

In his greed for earthly gain, he failed to remember his duty to God (Genesis 13:10,11; Psalm 62:10).

3. The shipwreck of King Saul

(1 Samuel 13:13,14).

Pride brought disobedience (1 Samuel 15:9–23; 1 Peter 5:5,6).

4. The shipwreck of Jehoshaphat

(2 Chronicles 18:1).

His downfall was caused by forming an alliance with the enemies of God (2 Chronicles 19:2; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

5. The shipwreck of Gehazi

(2 Kings 5:20–22).

Greed and deception were at the root of his actions (2 Kings 5:26,27; Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5).

6. The shipwreck of Demas

(2 Timothy 4:10).

Love for the world with its attractions brought the downfall of Demas (1 John 2:15–17; Matthew 16:26; 1 Peter 1:24).

—Herb Hull
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

S E R M O N S E E D S



LOOK AT THE HARVEST

John 4:27–38

INTRODUCTION:

Do you know anyone who would rather work than eat? I know those who would rather work than face other responsibilities—but not many who would rather work than eat. We call them workaholics. In this chapter, Jesus is working rather than eating.

MESSAGE:

1. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me” (verse 34).

I love to see a person who enjoys his or her work and is conscientious about his or her work. That’s the way Jesus was.

a. In Samaria:

- (1) Jesus was weary, hungry, and thirsty.
- (2) He was at Jacob’s well.
- (3) The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

- (4) His disciples had gone to get food.
- b. Conversation with a sinner.

- (1) The woman who came to the well.
- (2) Her defensive response.
- (3) His refusal to be turned off.
- (4) He reached into her soul.
- (5) She went away proclaiming what He had done.
- (6) What He did was “meat” to His body and soul.

2. “Say not ye” (verse 35). Watch out for closed mindedness.

- a. “There are yet 4 months”—The “what’s your hurry?” syndrome.

- (1) The delaying sinner.
- (2) The delaying saint.
- (3) The delaying storm.

- b. “Then cometh harvest” (verse 35).

- (1) We reap what we sow.
- (2) We reap what others sow.
- (a) Sins of the fathers.

- (b) Work of those before us.

- (c) Prayers of those before us.

- c. “Lift up your eyes” (verse 35). “Where there is no vision . . .” (Proverbs 29:18). None are so blind as they who have eyes but will not see.

- (1) “Look on the fields.”

- (a) May have been barren of crops.

- (b) Probably were full of people.

- (2) “They are white already to harvest.”

- (a) A harvest of past sins?

- (b) A harvest of present opportunities?

- (c) A harvest of ongoing work for God?

- (d) A harvest of prayer?

- d. “And he that reapeth . . .” (verse 36).

CONCLUSION:

It is harvesttime. Let’s be part of it.

—Warren F. McPherson, *Springfield, Missouri*

MARY MAGDALENE—A LIFE OF THANKSGIVING

Luke 8:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

For the believer, Thanksgiving is not just a holiday, it’s a way of living. Consider Mary Magdalene. Before Jesus found her, she was a desperate woman, driven by demons. Jesus cast out seven demons, and Mary lived the rest of her life in thanksgiving.

MESSAGE:

1. Out of thanksgiving she followed Jesus faithfully and supported Him financially (Mark 15:40,41; Luke 8:1–3).

- a. Mary did not give in order to get. She had already received so much. The proper motive for giving is always love and gratitude.
- b. Jesus did not accept her gifts because He needed them. Could not the one who turned water into wine, fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish, and took tax money from a fish’s mouth provide for His own needs? He received her gifts of

thanksgiving because she needed to give, because He wanted her to have a part in His ministry. Thanksgiving is not an obligation, but a privilege.

2. Thanksgiving gave her a loyalty that defied even danger and death (Matthew 27:55–65; Mark 15:33–47).

- a. Mary could never forget what Jesus had done for her; consequently, no distance was too far, no danger too great. Like Ruth, she determined in her heart, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16,17, NIV).
- b. She was with Jesus in His sufferings and death. She saw it all, and it must have broken her heart because there was nothing she could do. Is it not likely that her presence and outpouring of love and thanksgiving encouraged Jesus in His last hours?
- c. Like Mary, we all have been delivered from our sinful past. We are all debtors

to Jesus. Let us, like her, pour out our lives in thanksgiving to the One who gave himself for us.

3. Jesus rewarded her love and thanksgiving by appearing first to her after His resurrection (Mark 16:9).

- a. Mary came early to the Garden tomb expecting to offer one last gesture of thanksgiving, but instead she was rewarded for her faithfulness with an encounter with her risen Lord.
- b. An attitude of thanksgiving always dispels the gloom and darkness, giving us a new vision of our Lord and renewed direction for our lives.

CONCLUSION:

At this Thanksgiving, let’s remember all the Lord’s benefits (Psalm 103:1–5). Out of a life of thanksgiving, let us give ourselves anew to Christ and His cause.

—Richard Exley
Tulsa, Oklahoma

S E R M O N S E E D S

THE WILL OF GOD: THANKSGIVING

1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV

INTRODUCTION:

God wants us to be thankful to Him for our blessings in spite of our difficulties.

MESSAGE:

1. The sacrifice of thanksgiving—"give thanks."

- "Thanks" is present, imperative, active, second person, plural, and denotes continuous action.
- What is thanks?
 - An expression of someone's gratitude.
 - An acknowledgment of someone's generosity.
- Who deserves thanks? God.
 - Because of His actions as:

- Creator.
 - Ruler.
 - Redeemer.
- (2) Because of His attributes of:
- eternity.
 - infinity.
 - energy (always powerful).
 - integrity (always perceiving).
 - immanency (always present).

2. The sphere of thanksgiving—"in all circumstances."

- In factual circumstances.
- In fanciful circumstances.

3. The submission to thanksgiving—"for this is God's will." We submit to giving thanks because it is:

- God's purpose for us. (He wants us to be grateful because it's good for us to

recognize our limitations.)

- God's position toward us. (He wants to be our Benefactor.)
- God's pleasure for us. (He wants to be pleased with us.)

CONCLUSION:

We need to be thankful to God for our blessings in spite of our difficulties. We need to be thankful individually (5:18) "for you." We need to be thankful Christo-centrally (5:18) "in Christ Jesus."

Write down something for which you are thankful. It will solidify your gratitude. (Hymn, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.")

—Steve D. Eutsler
Springfield, Missouri

GROWTH THROUGH MEMBERSHIP

Acts 2:1-4,41-47

INTRODUCTION:

The Early Church may not have had a formal membership roll, but the Holy Spirit brought believers together in strong bonds of fellowship. There was a new, distinctive community in Jerusalem. Each person who accepted Christ was added to that community.

The areas of the early Christians' growth stand out clearly throughout the Book of Acts.

MESSAGE:

1. They grew in their personal devotion to Christ.

- At Pentecost, the multitude heard the followers of Jesus proclaim in other tongues the "wonderful works of God." It is clear from Peter's sermon that the central theme of those testimonies was the redemptive work of Jesus.
 - Jesus Christ is the theme of every sermon recorded in Acts. When the apostles were beaten for their preaching, they counted it an honor to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41).
- #### 2. They grew in their understanding of the Word of God.
- Doctrine was important to the Early Church. It was one of the things in which they "continued steadfastly" (Acts 2:42).

- At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit opened Peter's understanding of an Old Testament prophecy. Peter suddenly perceived that Joel predicted the very thing that was now happening.
- Peter also comprehended Moses' prophecy about the coming Prophet. The Spirit revealed to him that all of the prophets had spoken of the Messiah's mission (Acts 3:19-26).
- When the Church came together for prayer after the arrest and release of Peter and John, they sensed they were witnessing a fulfillment of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:24-28).

3. They grew in their perception of each believer's responsibility to the body of Christ.

- They felt responsible for the material welfare of fellow Christians (Acts 2:44,45). Their sense of stewardship was so strong that no one considered his possessions his own (Acts 4:32).
- When one member of the Body was in trouble, the rest supported him in unceasing prayer (Acts 12:5).
- Even when God disciplined two sinning church members, the others held steady and continued their work for the Lord without interruption (Acts 5:11-16).
- When a problem arose that created a temporary disruption of unity, the

Church acted responsibly in resolving the matter (Acts 6:1-6).

4. They grew in their outreach and concern for the lost.

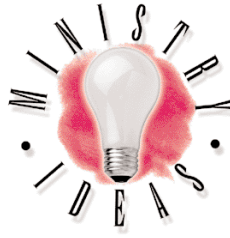
- The multitude saved at Pentecost was only the beginning of the spiritual harvest. The salvation of souls was a daily occurrence (Acts 2:47).
- When persecution came, the Christians did not pray for relief but for more boldness to proclaim the name of Jesus (Acts 4:29,30).
- When many believers had to leave their homes because of persecution, they used this as an opportunity to spread the message of Jesus (Acts 8:4).

CONCLUSION:

Luke used interesting expressions to describe the growth of the Early Church. He wrote about people being "added to the church" (Acts 2:47) and "added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). We are told that the Word of God increased (Acts 6:7), grew mightily, and prevailed (Acts 19:20). Such expressions show that the growth was perfectly balanced—both numerical and spiritual.

We are nearly 20 centuries removed from the Early Church, but God's pattern for growth is unchanged.

—Kenneth D. Barney
Springfield, Missouri



BACK-TO-SCHOOL BASH

As the end of summer approaches, children ask their moms, “When are we getting our school supplies?” How does a mom respond when there isn’t money to buy them?

A mother on welfare who shops with food stamps doesn’t even have enough for food. Her children go to school empty-handed. When the schoolteacher asks for supplies, the child hangs his or her head with a crushed spirit.

Believing that God wants us to reach the children and their parents through meeting the needs of children, we make a Back-to-School Bash an annual event. We work with our county and public school systems, explaining our desire to supply the underprivileged and struggling mothers in the community with school supplies for their children. In most cases, schools give a list of the supplies needed for each grade. They also give us a list of parents who need assistance.

We approach the business community and ask for donations and discounts on school supplies. The entire congregation is involved, bringing in supplies, putting them together, and distributing them.

Because of our Back-to-School Bashes, many moms and schoolteachers from our schools have been saved and are attending our church. Some are involved in the children’s ministry.

—Gilbert Ceballos, children’s pastor,
New Life Assembly of God, Pembroke Pines, Florida

CHILDREN’S ACTIVITY BOXES

To keep children occupied during church services, we use 9- by 12-inch activity boxes filled with various items: a small box of crayons; outdated Sunday school papers; a dot-to-dot picture; blank sheets of paper; a magic slate; finger puppets; puzzles; a small doll with bed and blanket; a small, quiet truck or car; and a wrapped package of graham crackers.

Parents pick up the boxes from a table in the back of church and return them afterward. The child can eat the crackers and keep the pictures he or she colors; the other items are returned to the box. If a child accidentally takes a toy home, parents are instructed not to make a big deal out of it, but to say, “This belongs to all the children at church,” and bring it back at the next service.

Most of the children are in children’s church; but for the shy child or visitor, the boxes are appreciated by parents and grandparents.

—Marie True, LaGrande, Oregon

CHURCH LIBRARY

Today’s young families are searching for ways to keep and preserve their children in God’s truth in the midst of a society that is hostile toward the things of God. Christian parents are always searching for tools and resources to help them disciple their children. Some young families don’t always have the financial resources to get them, or it can be difficult to discern what is true spiritual substance. To help them, our church developed a church library.

General Guidelines

1. Appoint a committee and delegate the various duties (purchase, promotions, and checkouts).
2. For donations and purchases, focus on quality, not quantity.
3. Make sure the books and videos support our Christian worldview and sound doctrine.
4. Get rid of books/videos that have not been checked out in 1 year, with the exception of classics and other useful reference books.
5. Start with a children’s library along with books on parenting. Add other age groupings later.

The church library can bring edification to the entire congregation.

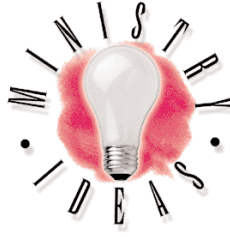
—Roger Johansson, Loris, South Carolina

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS AND THE BIBLE

Children are fascinated with things from long ago, like mummies, pyramids, and artifacts. We developed a curriculum that helps them see the correlation between ancient civilizations and the Bible.

How did the biblical characters interact with their cultures, and what impact did God have on these cultures? We researched and collected coloring pages, puzzles, snack ideas, and craft ideas for these ancient Middle Eastern cultures: Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Babylonians, the Medo Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. We study different Bible characters and cultures weekly and see how they interacted with the cultures around them. We have facts about each culture and show pictures of artifacts and drawings. The kids love the fast pace, and they see the Bible in a different light. It is important to tie the Bible into secular history for our children. Too often they see history and the biblical account as separate.

We also developed a large timeline on butcher paper that the kids can follow to see how major events happened and when. Did you know: The pyramids were already old when Abraham saw them for the first time? Joseph might have been



preserved as a mummy when his body was brought back to Israel from Egypt? The walls of Babylon were so thick two chariots could race side by side on them? Daniel knew; he lived it.

The Bible is not a fairy tale. It is an integral part of history, and many biblical figures played important roles. Your children will be amazed to learn about these cultures and so will you, if you research them.

—Nate Lashway, children's pastor,
First Assembly of God, Helena, Montana

DINOSAUR DAYS

Many children are fascinated with dinosaurs and prehistoric times. Far too often the only information available to them regarding dinosaurs is from an evolutionary standpoint.

We developed a curriculum incorporating dinosaurs and the Bible to show kids how the story of creation, the Bible, the Flood, and other elements of Scripture are compatible with what we know about dinosaurs. We discuss the evolution-versus-creation controversy and show children there is an alternative for explaining dinosaurs and their demise.

The children begin by studying the days of creation, the Flood, and how fossils are formed. We also look at the Book of Job regarding the leviathan and behemoth. How could a behemoth be an elephant or hippo if his tail was as thick as a cedar tree? Couldn't he just as easily have been an apatosaurus or other such creature? We gleaned coloring pages and puzzles from various sources to match the theme each week. We also have snacks that are dinosaur-like. We do crafts like fossil making and leaf imprints. Toward the end of the series we make giant Styrofoam dinosaurs out of big sheets of insulating foam. The children spray paint them and hang them for display. We also sing dinosaur related songs. Later we devote a week each to studying different carnivores, herbivores, flyers, and swimming dinos.

The kids don't want to miss a Sunday, and it attracts kids of all ages. A few adults wander in to keep an eye on their children, but stay to learn more about dinosaurs themselves.

With research and creativity, you can put together a series that the kids will talk about for years, and at the same time address a topic they hear only from an evolution standpoint.

—Nate Lashway, children's pastor,
First Assembly of God, Helena, Montana

PICTURE I.D. FOR CHILDREN

We take a Polaroid snapshot of each child. On the back of the picture we write the child's name, address, phone number,

birthday, and his or her parents' and grandparents' names.

This gives the pastor a picture record of each child and it also helps him know the child's family as well.

—Marie True, La Grande, Oregon

SATURDAY SUNDAY SCHOOL

In the early 1990s, a group of volunteers and a pastor's wife birthed a program that is changing the adolescent face of Spokane. Today, almost 9 years later, Saturday Sunday school operates 13 buses and reaches over 1,200 children. Weekly attendance changes due to the unsettled environments of many of the children.

Yellow school buses collect children from every social and economic background, including the shelter for abused women and the Salvation Army. No child is denied the opportunity to come to Saturday Sunday school. Over 70 committed volunteers sacrifice their time on Saturdays to fill various needs in the program.

After the morning bus run, children pour into the sanctuary. Boys fill one side of the sanctuary and girls fill the other side, as upbeat music provokes participation. The atmosphere of joy spreads, enticing the often hurting children to leave their cares behind for a time of refreshing. Through competitive games, kids learn to excel and reach beyond their self-made limitations.

One Saturday program included a surprise visit from a newly married bride and groom dressed in wedding attire. The little girls' eyes sparkled at the beautiful bride, and the boys focused on the tuxedo-clad groom as they heard of God's plan for a man and woman in marriage. Because some of the children's parents have never been married, and some children don't know both of their parents, the concept of marriage is foreign. The kids are encouraged to remain pure for their wedding day and to say no to compromising God's plan for marriage.

What reward does the pastor's wife get from the endless hours she invests in the children? "My greatest reward is when a child pulls on my leg and asks me to pray for him or her. Kids really do want God to work in their lives."

—Therese Marszalek, Spokane Christian Center,
Spokane, Washington

SEND US YOUR IDEAS

Enrichment will pay up to \$50 for each published account of a program idea. Send your ideas, along with a detailed description, to: Ministry Ideas, *Enrichment* journal, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802-1894.

E-mail: You may send your ministry ideas to: enrichmentjournal@ag.org.



JUST BOW A KNEE

An interviewer was speaking with former Oakland Raider quarterback, Kenny Stabler. He asked the quarterback, "Out of all of the plays you were asked to run, which one was your favorite?"

The interviewer expected to hear: "The ghost [Dave Casper] to the post (where his favorite tight end would run a post pattern)"; or, "The long bombs down the sideline to my speedy, wide receiver Cliff Branch"; or possibly, "A short pass to one of my running backs out of the backfield."

Instead, Stabler replied: "My favorite play is 'win the game.' That is where your team is ahead, the time is running off the clock, and you ask your teammates to crowd in tight around you. The ball is hiked, and you take a knee. Victory has already been won. Just take a knee and win the game."

Many times we try to run another play and end up fumbling the ball. Christians already have the victory through Jesus Christ. Pastor Greg Laurie said: "We no longer fight *for* victory; we fight *from* victory." What a great truth. Christians need to learn to ask their teammates to come in close, bow their knee, and receive the victory.

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55–57, NIV).

—Submitted by David Schaal, Quincy, California.

PUNCHING HOLES IN YOUR DARKNESS

Robert Louis Stevenson was an invalid as a child. One evening he was propped up in a window, watching darkness settle over the city. His nurse entered the dark room and became upset to see him gazing into the darkness outside.

"Get away from that window," the nurse demanded, "You can't see anything out there."

"Oh, but I can see something wonderful out there," the sickly lad responded. "There's a man coming up the street punching holes in the darkness."

Stevenson saw the lamplighter lighting the gas streetlights. Each time he lit another one, to the young Stevenson, it looked like he was knocking a hole in the darkness, and the boy loved it.

Darkness is settling on our world. What do we see from our window ledge? Something gloomy and despairing? Something challenging? Or, better yet, what are you doing to punch holes in your darkness?

—Submitted by Warren McPherson, Springfield, Missouri.

SUNDAY SCHOOL FAILED JOHN DILLINGER

In the 1930s, John Dillinger was the most notorious criminal in the country. His plight might have been different if some parents had been more compassionate. As a boy, Dillinger was arrested for minor crimes and placed on probation. He was sent to Sunday school. Parents of the other pupils in the class protested and threatened to withdraw their children if this criminal remained in the class.

As a result, Johnny dropped out of Sunday school. He never returned. Approximately 20 years later, he was No. 1 on the list of most-wanted criminals. Judging from the sequence of events, that Sunday school class was the last opportunity society had to salvage a soul from hell.

—Reprinted from Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations (Dallas: Bible Communications, Inc., 1998). Used with permission.

THE WAGES OF KEEPING QUIET

In August 2000, the Russian submarine, *Kursk*, was reported to be in peril at the bottom of the Barents Sea above the Arctic Circle. Apparently a collision and subsequent explosion had crippled the 14,000-ton craft 354 feet beneath the surface of the frigid waters. For 4 days the Russian military refused to acknowledge the crisis or seek help from other countries. When word was finally released about the crisis, the world held its breath wondering if the 118 Russians aboard the nuclear-powered sub would have enough oxygen to breathe until Norwegian and British rescue teams could dock with the submerged vessel. Sadly, when the rescue teams arrived on August 20, the entire crew had perished.

The plight of a doomed submarine is a graphic picture of the plight of Christians who fail to acknowledge their spiritual need. In Psalm 32, David recalls the suffocating guilt that robbed him of his spiritual life when he refused to confess his sin. In contrast, he celebrates the freedom that comes when we acknowledge our helplessness and receive the forgiveness God offers.

—Submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois.

—John Jewel

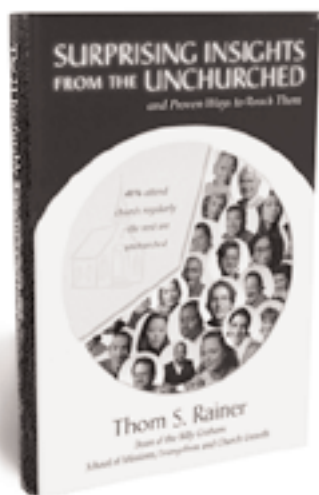
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book reviews



SURPRISING INSIGHTS FROM THE UNCHURCHED AND PROVEN WAYS TO REACH THEM

Thom S. Rainer (Zondervan, 290 pp., hardcover)

Surprising Insights from the Un-churched lives up to its name, providing conclusions to reaching the lost that may surprise some pastors. What makes this book unique is that the people surveyed are not the unchurched, per se, but rather the formerly unchurched. These new Christians clearly voice what factors led them to Christ and then to become active in a local church. A number of myths, such as “the Sunday school is ineffective in attracting the unchurched,” are shown to be untrue.

Rainer combines the results of excellent research with a wealth of real-life stories. The charts and survey results blended with the well-chosen stories keep the reader focused. The book is especially useful to pastors as the results show the importance of the pastor's role in reaching the unchurched. The primacy of strong, biblical preaching and authenticity in the pulpit are two areas viewed as crucial to those seeking spiritual truth. An entire chapter is devoted to “preaching that connects with the

unchurched.” Another excellent chapter discusses the personal strengths and weaknesses of pastors of highly effective churches.

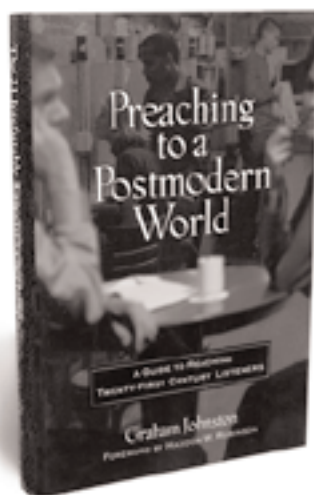
This book will fuel your evangelistic passion. It confronts basic issues in reaching the lost without the trappings of trendy methodologies.

—Reviewed by Brett Nelson, student at
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Missouri.

PREACHING TO A POSTMODERN WORLD: A GUIDE TO REACHING TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LISTENERS

Graham MacPherson Johnston (Baker Book House, 189 pp., paperback)

Johnston provides a useful introduction to the challenge faced by Christian communicators who want to speak to North America's emerging culture in a language that can be



understood. The work captures the single biggest issue that should be occupying Christian communicators in our day. Reasoning from culture to craft, the author provides a succinct discussion of both the philosophy and culture of postmodernism.

Although drawn largely from

secondary sources, Johnston's treatment of postmodernity is quite clear and to the point. His discussion could easily be adapted to teaching or preaching in a local church context. Especially effective are the many, well-chosen quotations found throughout the book. These references to other commentators on the issue give the work a solidity and breadth that is sometimes lacking in books on this subject. I recommend *Preaching to a Postmodern World* as well-written, practical, and challenging.

—Reviewed by Earl Creps, director
of the D.Min. program, Assemblies
of God Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Missouri.

WHAT COLOR IS YOUR GOD?: MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

James and Lillian Breckenridge (Baker Book House, 255 pp., paperback)

In *What Color Is Your God?* authors James and Lillian Breckenridge offer the reader a description and analysis of multiculturalism in America today, pointing out both the challenges and opportunities it presents. They discuss cultural differences in general and provide more specific treatment to Hispanic-Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, and African-Americans. Their purpose is to “provide at least a beginning toward . . . a textbook dealing with multicultural education in the church.”

To this end, they give biblical perspective to the various social themes that arise from multiculturalism and offer a theological framework for examining the appropriate Christian response. They do not leave the reader wondering what practical steps the church should take to minister

effectively in and to a multicultural society.

The authors call on church and denominational leaders to follow action with words, for “equality can only come by sacrificing what is



perhaps the most desired human possession—power.” The end product, as they see it, is that “the church will become an extended family in which all will feel welcome regardless of sociological profile.”

Church leaders who are interested in becoming more proactive in multicultural ministry will find this book to be a good primer. Those who read it will be pleased with the practical application.

—Reviewed by David Moore, executive vice president of administration for Convoy of Hope, Springfield, Missouri.

BUILDING A CHURCH OF SMALL GROUPS: A PLACE WHERE NOBODY STANDS ALONE

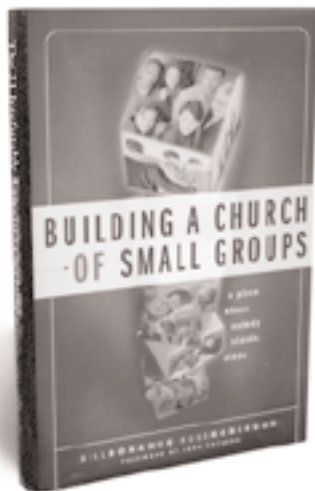
Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson
(Zondervan, 219 pp., hardcover)

Numerous books have been written on small-group church ministries. This book explores the development, transition,

and transformation of Willow Creek Community Church. It is definitely a how-to resource. It is written to carefully explain the vision and values of one large suburban church, as it made a shift from seeker-oriented worship to a total restructuring of its disciple-making groups. It also presents a balanced guide of principles that can be useful to any church of any size as it examines its own mission. A strategy to work through change is presented.

In the first and second sections, a church is encouraged to capitalize on what it does well.

Part three presents useful information on group development through effective leadership enlistment and training. A coach for every five members is encouraged for spiritual and practical support.



Part four provides a comprehensive overview of the procedures for implementing dynamic ministry. For example, transitioning from a traditional adult Sunday school class to a group model provides a master teacher leading the first part, then small groups discussing the lesson.

This book challenges pastors with an

experience-based and biblically grounded model for developing effective volunteer leadership for discipling all believers.

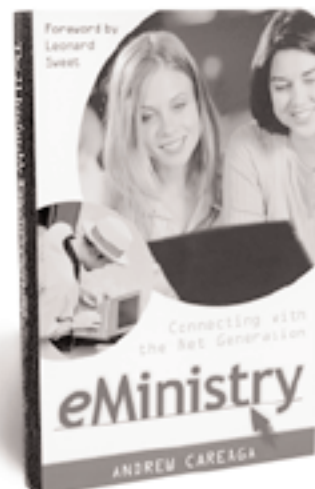
—Reviewed by Vic Ostrom, Ed.D.,
former professor of Christian education,
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Missouri.

eMINISTRY, CONNECTING WITH THE NET GENERATION

(Andrew Careaga, Kregel Publications, 215 pp., paperback)

Andrew Careaga presents a knowledgeable discussion of the characteristics of today’s cyber-savvy generation, as well as the challenges they present to the traditional church. Within the context of this generational study, Careaga also explores the challenges and drawbacks of the Internet and seeks to address ways the church can respond to its pervasive influence. The book contains informative statistics that are relevant and up-to-date, as well as identifies significant trends that will demand the church’s present and future attention.

Careaga’s book is strong on diagnosis. His assessment of *what* the church must do is insightful and accurate. However, the book falls short on the *how* and





book reviews

other practical and prescriptive examples or role models of remedy.

The book's greatest contributions are: one of the clearest descriptions of what postmodern culture is (chapter 4); the outstanding lists of resources following each chapter; and the excellent advice and helps for parents regarding how to be actively involved in protecting younger children from the dangers of the Internet. Although Internet-savvy readers may not find a great deal of new knowledge from Careaga's book, those desiring an intermediate introduction with futuristic insight will not be disappointed.

—Reviewed by Gene Roncone, director of Church Development and Education, administrative assistant to the superintendent, Northern California and Nevada Assemblies of God District.

MUSTARD SEED VERSUS MCWORLD

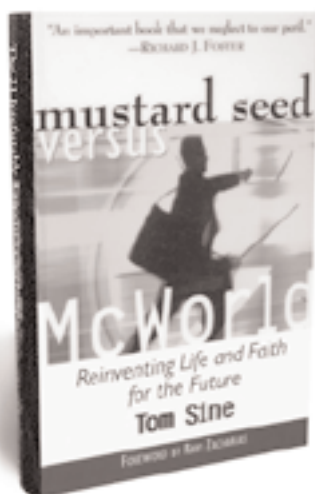
Tom Sine (Baker Book House, 249 pp., hardback)

Tom Sine has seen the future. No, he is not a prophet—he is a Christian futurist like Leonard Sweet. But where *SoulTsunami* emphasizes flashy technological change, Sine focuses on vast economic changes. *Mustard Seed Versus McWorld* is about the implications of globalization for the church.

Sine's thesis is simple: economic globalization (the eradication of all barriers to free trade) is coming. As a result, laypeople will be even busier and poorer, leading to decreased volunteerism and giving. Things aren't about to get any easier for the church.

Sine structures his book into three parts: "A Crisis of Foresight" (how we can better anticipate the future), "A Crisis of Vision" (how we can better distinguish between society and God's ideals), and "A Crisis of Creativity"

(how we can better respond to these insights). In each section he offers practical suggestions and describes strategies that are working now. Sine doesn't simply tell us to emulate the success of the megachurches; instead, he points to small, but growing bodies around the world that are making a real difference.



Overall, Sine's book is helpful and readable. Like all futurists, he should be read with discernment. If a church implements every change he mentions, it will be an odd church. But make no mistake: globalization is coming. He notes, "Of the 100 largest economies in the world today, 51 are corporations." Sine can help you begin thinking constructively about the opportunities and challenges globalization will bring.

—Reviewed by Glen Davis, assistant campus pastor, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri.

THE END OF THE WORLD . . . AS WE KNOW IT

Chuck Smith, Jr. (Waterbrook Press, 256 pp., hardback)

This book by Chuck Smith, Jr. (the son

of Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel fame) is an excellent primer into our postmodern world.

Chuck spends the first four chapters defining postmodernism. These chapters, although they are not always easy reading, are worth the price of the book for any pastor who wants to be in tune with where our world is today. Chuck describes Christians "arriving on the playing field of modernity, carrying their bats, gloves, and baseballs, just as everyone else has switched to soccer." His goal is to stir Christians to recognize the New World in which we live.

The last half of the book deals with postmodern faith. Younger generations do not worship or express their faith the same way we do.



If you are looking for a book to give you a list of what-to-do's or how-to-do's this is not it. Although in the last few chapters Chuck gives some practical implications of pastoring in a postmodern world, this is not a strength of the book. I did not find the practical ministry suggestions relevant to my situation.

Read this book if you want a better

handle on postmodernism; skip it if you have a good grasp on the topic and are now looking for ways to implement new ideas into your ministry.

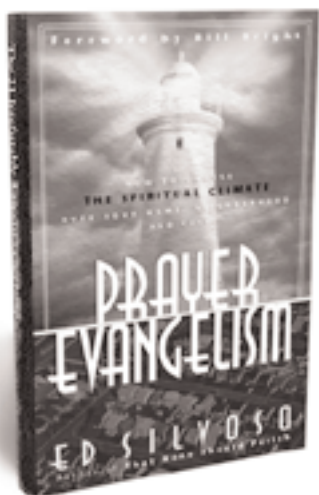
—Reviewed by Brent Sorlien,
Oak Harbor Assembly of God,
Oak Harbor, Washington.

PRAYER EVANGELISM: HOW TO CHANGE THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE OVER YOUR HOME, NEIGHBORHOOD, AND CITY

Ed Silvano (Regal, 252 pp., paperback)

Do you wish you could experience a spiritual climate in your community? Do you wish that the efforts of outreach and evangelism that you make would find more fertile soil? You can, according to Ed Silvano, through prayer evangelism.

Silvano, a product of Assemblies of God missions in Argentina, is regarded by many, from Bill Bright to Jack Hayford, as a seminal Christian teacher.



His prayer evangelism strategy—best known by the phrase *lighthouses of prayer*—has been applied throughout the Western Hemisphere, including being endorsed and utilized by Mission America.

Lighthouses of prayer is blessing the lost rather than cursing them, and talking to God about your neighbor/coworker before you talk to your neighbor/coworker about God. Hundreds of believers in our own area have implemented prayer evangelism strategies and have seen marvelous, God-given results.

The last half of *Prayer Evangelism* is especially important. In it Silvano addresses the changing paradigms/wineskins in the body of Christ. All readers may not agree with his conclusions, but I would heartily recommend this work to all pastors to become better informed regarding the prayer and unity movements that are rapidly accelerating within evangelical Christianity in America.

—Reviewed by Paul E. Grabill, senior
pastor, State College Assembly of God,
State College, Pennsylvania.

ANOTHER LOOK

R.L. Brandt (Huntington House Publishers, 215 pp., paperback)

Another Look is a candid reflection of the spirit of its author. Having known Robert Brandt for more than 30 years and having engaged in lengthy conversations involving theological questions with him, I hold the deepest respect for his approach to biblical interpretation.

Several things reflect this spiritual depth from the pages of the text. They include:

1. **The authority of Scripture.** In his wide-ranging review of scriptural themes, he relies on what the text declares, rather than depending on teaching that has, over time, grown up around the text. He lets the Bible speak for itself.
2. **The integrity of Scripture.** The author's unshakable commitment to



the infallibility and divine inspiration of the Scriptures brings breadth and depth to his writing.

3. **The searcher.** In his text, the author follows the example of the Berean Christians in Acts 17:11,12 who “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Robert Brandt has continued to be a searcher.

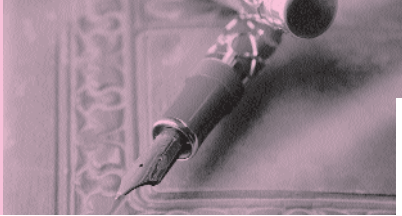
4. **The seeker.** Not only has the writer been a searcher of Scripture, he has also been a seeker after God, asking the Spirit of God, who inspired the Scripture, to illuminate the Word.

For those who wish to go beyond the status quo in their Christian walk, this book is a treasure of fresh, enriching reading.

—Reviewed by Almon M. Bartholomew,
former New York District superintendent
and executive presbyter of the Assemblies of
God. He resides in Queensbury, New York.

A SERVICE

Enrichment reviews books we feel our readers would like to know about. These books are not always in accord with our point of view, and the reviews do not constitute a recommendation of the books. As a service to readers the Gospel Publishing House will supply any of these books, but books cannot be returned for credit.



news & resources

2002 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY MINISTRY

Special Touch Ministry, Inc., the Assemblies of God Home Missions outreach that serves the concerns of people with disabilities nationwide, will present the 2002 National Conference on Disability Ministry, Nov. 1, 2, 2002, at Central Assembly in Springfield, Mo. This groundbreaking ministry conference will include a Friday night invocation service featuring George Wood, general secretary for the Assemblies of God. The main conference on Saturday will present three tracks of workshops by speakers from across the nation including: Richard Stimson, from The Special Gathering; and Jim and Rhonette Hukill, from Eleos—the Care Network. Charlie Chivers, Assemblies of God national representative for Ministry to People with Disabilities and Special Touch Ministry executive director, will be the keynote speaker on Saturday.

When asked about the conference, Chivers said, “In this age of conference calls, fax transmittals, and E-mail updates, we believe there is a special dynamic that occurs when we set aside time to come together and reconsecrate ourselves as one body dedicated to a single purpose—compelling the lost, the hurting, and the dying to come into the family of God. In coming together to combine our knowledge, sharpen our skills, and receive from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we emerge with a renewed sense that we are cleansed for service, called to compassion, and commissioned for action.”

The contemporary Christian music group, Treasure, will provide music throughout the weekend. The 2002 National Conference on Disability Ministry is being cohosted in Springfield by the Assemblies of God

national Center for the Blind, Special Touch Chapter of the Ozarks, and Central Assembly of God.

Parties interested in attending the 2002 National Conference on Disability should contact: Special Touch Ministry, Inc., P.O. Box 25, Waupaca, WI 54981, Phone: 715-258-2713; Fax: 715-258-2777; E-mail: ministry@specialtouch.org.

BENEVOLENCES CHILD CARE HARVEST FESTIVALS IN OCTOBER

Highlands Child Placement Services is the pro-life ministry of the Assemblies of God. This maternity home provides free housing, care, and training for girls and young women facing unexpected pregnancies. Highlands will hold its annual Harvest Festival on Friday, Oct. 11, 2002.

Hillcrest Children's Home takes in boys, girls, and teens who must leave their homes for a period of time or who have nowhere else to go. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18, 19, 2002, are the dates set for the Hillcrest Harvest Festival.

Harvest Festivals offer churches and individuals the opportunity to assist needy children and youth. Church members and leaders are invited to visit the homes during the Harvest Festivals (or any time of the year) to witness what God is doing in the lives of the residents.

To order Harvest Festival needs lists, or to get more information on these events, call 417-862-2781, ext. 2182, or click on: www.benevolences.ag.org.

AGED MINISTERS ASSISTANCE DAY IS NOV. 17

Sunday, Nov. 17, is Aged Ministers Assistance Day. Churches are encouraged to set aside an offering for the nearly 500 retired and disabled preachers on the AMA rolls.

During the month of Thanksgiving, please remember these godly saints

whose labor of love and service helped lay the spiritual foundation of the Assemblies of God.

You may order AMA Day bulletin inserts by phoning the national Benevolences Department at 417-862-2781, ext. 2182, or click on: www.ama.ag.org, to download a bulletin insert you can copy.

2003 LFTL CONVENTION

Light for the Lost will celebrate its 50th anniversary April 25, 26, 2003, in beautiful Corpus Christi, Tex. Everyone is invited for Christian fellowship and stories of what God is doing with evangelism literature around the world. Featured speakers will be: Prince Guneratnam, general superintendent of Malaysia; Chuck Freeman, Oklahoma LFTL director; and others. You won't want to miss this anniversary celebration. For more information, call 1-800-988-0292, or go to: www.lftl.ag.org. For room rates and reservations, call The Omni in Corpus Christi at 361-887-1600.

LFTL AND YOUTH ALIVE

Light for the Lost has joined hands with Youth Alive in an effort to place a free copy of the mini-magazine *Real Hope* in the hands of every high school student in America. *Real Hope*, produced by Youth Alive and national Youth Ministries, presents the hope of Jesus Christ through interviews and dramatic stories, packaged in a full-color format attractive to today's youth. A growing number of high school students have been brought into the Kingdom because of this magazine, and now with the support of LFTL funds, every student in America will have that chance. To support this project, please mark your gifts with project number 8586 and mail to: Light for the Lost, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802.

If you would like more information on how you can use this evangelism tool in your local school, please contact Youth Alive at 1-800-545-2766, or visit the Youth Alive Web site at: www.ya.ag.org.

NATIONAL RV CONVENTION DATES

Mission America Placement Services is hosting two national RV conventions in 2002. The 5-day conventions will be held Sept. 29–Oct. 3 in Carlinville, Ill., and Oct. 20–24, in Palm Desert, Calif.

Both conventions will provide RVers and prospective RVers an opportunity to take part in workshops, seminars, and worship services. They will also be given opportunity to become involved with MAPS projects across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

To learn more about MAPS or these conventions, call 417-862-2781, ext. 1385, or E-mail: HomeMissionsMaps@ag.org.

2002 NATIONAL MISSIONETTES WEEK IS SEPT. 8–14

The 2002 Missionettes annual theme, Dream Big, is supported by the Scripture,

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NLT). The national Missionettes staff wants girls to understand that God’s dream for their lives is greater than even their own. Dream Big encourages girls to go beyond their own imaginations to discover what God has in store for them.

If your church has not received the annual Missionettes Theme/Sleepover packet, please call the national Missionettes office for your free materials. The packet contains promotional plans and materials, a Sleepover planning guide, and the new catalog.

The purpose of Missionettes is to win girls to Jesus Christ and teach them to obey everything He commanded. *Club Connection* magazine is part of our national ministry to encourage girls in their commitment to Christ and to have fun living for Him. A promotional flyer and order form for *Club Connection* are included in the packet mailed to local Missionettes coordinators.

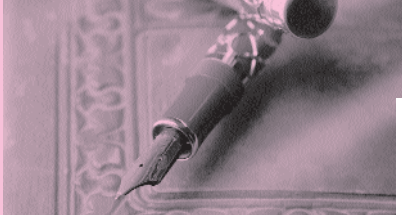
The annual Missionettes Week offering, received during local Missionettes Week

services, helps the national office cover administration costs and provide services to over 200,000 girls and sponsors involved in the Assemblies of God Missionettes program.

2002 NATIONWIDE MISSIONETTES SLEEPOVER

The annual Nationwide Missionettes Sleepover is Sept. 27,28. This year’s theme: The Sky’s the Limit. Kick off your church’s Missionettes program with a big event and support a great project at the same time. All Coins for Kids offerings will support the Health for the Helpless project of HealthCare Ministries. This ministry helps vulnerable children, victimized women, persons with disabilities, and displaced persons. All Coins for Kids funds will be included in your church’s total BGMC giving.

Every church reporting a Missionettes ministry on the Annual Church Ministries Report will receive a combination Annual Theme/Sleepover Packet. If you have not yet received your packet, call to request your free planning materials at 417-862-2781, ext. 4074, or check our Web site: www.missionettes.ag.org for a downloadable version.



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SPANISH MISSIONETTES CURRICULUM UPDATE

Translation of the Missionettes curriculum continues with help from the 2001 Coins for Kids offerings, which totaled approximately \$80,000. The following Spanish curriculum and products are now available: *Guia de Adiestramiento para Líderes de Misioneritas* (Missionettes Leader Training Guide), *Club Arcoiris Guia de la Instructora* (Rainbows Sponsor Guide), *Libro de Actividades para Arcoiris* (Rainbows Activity Book), *Club Margaritas Guia de la Instructora* (Daisies Sponsor Guide), *Libro de Actividades para Margaritas* (Daisies Activity Book). A Spanish/English Missionettes Theme song CD is also available. Projected release of the Prims curriculum is late 2002.

MUSIC MINISTRY NETWORK

Resources for your music ministry are available through the Music Ministry Network. A subscription includes a 16-page newsletter with insightful, relevant articles from music ministers across the country, resources for your music program, and much more.

A subscription also includes the newest articles from the Leadership Training Series, a growing resource that is a must-have for every church music program. Also featured are full-length articles on topics such as growing your choir, choosing a sound system, tips on better choir and instrumental directing, and more on every aspect of a church music ministry. New articles are sent mid-quarter, so it's an ever-growing resource.

Also included are *New Songs for Exciting Worship*, the tape series that features a live worship project from a local church. Hear original, exciting praise and worship music you won't find anywhere else. Call 417-862-2781, ext. 4130, to become a member today. A

year's subscription is \$40, and you can order all the back issues of the Leadership Training Series for \$14.95 (plus shipping and handling).

DISCOVER MUSIC

This new resource, available from the national Music Department, contains everything you need to teach a basic music reading course. After completing this course, your music ministry will better understand written music. Reproducible worksheets and charts, teacher's notes and outlines, and a wealth of suggestions and ideas make this resource the perfect addition to any church serious about having a more effective music ministry. Call 417-862-2781, ext. 4130, to order today. The cost is \$24.95 (plus shipping and handling).

SINGLE ADULT MINISTRIES REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Single Adult Ministries conferences are designed to raise awareness of the need for young adult and single adult ministry on a local, regional, and national level. Our dual purpose is to train volunteer and paid leaders, as well as reach singles. Both groups will benefit from these specialized training and spiritual growth conferences:

First Assembly, Fort Wayne, Ind., Sept. 12–14, 2002

First Assembly, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Oct. 24–26, 2002

Portland Christian Center, Portland, Oreg., Nov. 8–10, 2002

Bethany Church, Wyckoff, N.J., Nov. 15–17, 2002

For further information, contact the Single Adult Ministries Department, 417-862-2781, ext. 4125.

NATIONAL SINGLE ADULT TEAM

The Single Adult Ministries Department

now has in place a national team, representing eight regions of the country. This team assists in developing single adult and young adult ministries through consultations, training, resources, networking, and speaking at events. Call or E-mail a representative in your area:

Northwest—Craig Gorc, 425-488-3600, craig.g@cedarpark.org

Southeast—Carolyn Heuer, 803-794-1001, cheuer6433@aol.com

Southwest—Louie Nava, 916-856-5683, louie@capchrist.org

Great Lakes—Scott Nelson, 219-482-3508, scottnelson@ilovejesus.com

Gulf Region—Mike Powers, 870-425-6204, mypowers@centuryinter.net

South Central—Gary Pratt, 580-536-9325, firstaog@sunnet.net

Northeast—Rob Rhoden, 804-754-0712, exile@weag.org

North Central—Rick Summerhays, 319-393-6353, rlsummerhays@cedar-rapids.net

NEW KINDERGARTEN PRODUCT

The fall 2002 kindergarten Sunday school materials are all new. Every piece of the kindergarten product line has a new look, from the Bible visuals to the teacher guide, to the student items. But that's the least of the changes to this product line. Here are the more substantial changes being made:

New outlines. A new focus on basic Bible stories, such as Noah and the ark, Jonah and the whale, and David and Goliath. Three units of study per quarter offer variety. Christmas and Easter always have a complete unit of study devoted to these holidays. A lesson about the Holy Spirit is provided for each Pentecost Sunday.

New lesson format. A new design for the *Kindergarten Teacher Guide* features white space for teacher notes,

a user-friendly lesson structure, and the same generous number of activities as before.

New student book. *Kindergarten Lesson Pages* provide teachers with an easy-to-prepare classroom activity. These single-page lessons provide a weekly coloring page and a full-color Bible review activity. Since each weekly page is perforated, you can buy fewer books by basing your order quantity on average attendance, and not on the total number on your classroom roll.

More color in the handwork packet. The handwork packet still features hands-on activities for the children to create; we've just added color to make it more attractive.

Improved take-home paper. We renamed it, changed the way it looks, and changed its focus. The new *Kidz Adventures* still contains the weekly Bible story and a life-application story. But the new, more colorful activities focus on life application.

For more information or to order the new Radiant Life kindergarten curriculum call Gospel Publishing House at 1-800-641-4310.

SAM MUSIC FEST/CELEBRATION

Senior Adult Ministries and the national Music Department announce plans for a national SAM Music Fest/Celebration to be held at the magnificent Chateau on the Lake in Branson, Mo., Nov. 17–19, 2002. This is the second national event planned by the SAM Department. This event will promote fellowship and ministry among Assemblies of God senior adults.

Special guests include Doug and Laura Oldham, Sue Dodge, Bob and Jeannie Johnson, and Larry Ford, all of whom appear on the Gaither Homecomings.

Special events will include an old-fashioned hymn sing with Doug and Laura Oldham, as well as a concert by all of our guests. Other exciting activities will take place during the 3-day celebration.

For additional information regarding the SAM Music Fest/Celebration, call 1-417-862-2781, and request either Senior Adult Ministries, ext. 3311, or the Music Department, ext. 4130. You may also visit our Web sites at: www.sam.ag.org, or www.music.ag.org.

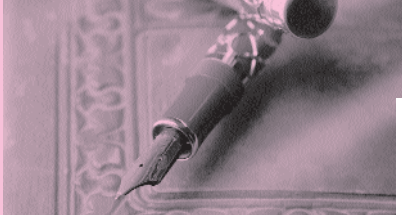
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TRAINING VIDEO

A new training video is available Sept. 2002, from the national Women's Ministries Department. The video, based on *The Leader's Guide for Successfully Ministering to Women*, will prepare women for leadership in the 21st century. Churches can purchase the video for onsite training. Women also have the option of taking the training in the comfort of their own homes. Cost is \$29.99 for the video, *Successfully Ministering to Women-Video* (735315), plus \$15.99 for the *Successfully Ministering to Women-Manual* (02-0306). Order by calling 1-800-641-4310, or www.GospelPublishing.com.

BOOK DONATIONS SOUGHT FOR PREACHERS LIBRARY

Retired pastors and others wanting to contribute books to a Pentecostal preachers library will receive a tax credit for their donation.

Assemblies of God General Superintendent Thomas E. Trask wishes to assist pastors of small churches in building their libraries. Trask and Gospel



news & resources

Publishing House provided several thousand books free to pastors attending the first Pentecostal Preachers Week in March of this year.

Books may be donated throughout the year, and will be stored at Gospel Publishing House for free distribution to pastors at the second annual PPW, scheduled for March 10–12, 2003.

For information regarding donations, call Danette McCabe at (417) 862-1447, ext. 3000.

YOUTH CURRICULUM INNOVATIONS

Radiant Life Youth Resources is currently unveiling the most relevant, practical, and functional line of youth ministry resources ever produced. The innovations come in response to direct and extensive contact with leaders and teachers in all facets of youth ministry. The practical application and personal ministry aspects of all resources will be greatly enhanced.

Over the course of this year, the teacher resources will incorporate a new, interactive, application-oriented lesson format, and the student resources will be more versatile than ever. If Radiant Life is not currently in your youth ministry arsenal, you owe it to your teachers to check it out. You'll be hard pressed to find a more relevant and comprehensive youth discipleship resource anywhere. For order information, contact Gospel Publishing House at 1-800-641-4310.

UNIFIED STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM RESOURCES AVAILABLE

What is the Unified Stewardship Program? The Unified Stewardship Program is a united effort of the Assemblies of God Foundation and the stewardship departments of most of our 58 district councils. The USP provides leadership

training in stewardship education and powerful tools to serve churches.

What is the will seminar program? Christian leaders are trained and certified to conduct will seminars, called Keys to Tomorrow seminars, in A/G churches throughout the country. Growth in 3 years has been explosive, from 38 seminar leaders to 250 seminar leaders now certified or in training. Over 2,500 wills have been requested in less than 1 year, with bequests to local churches, district projects, and missions. The demand is growing.

What next? Several regional training sessions are planned around the country for those interested in joining the Unified Stewardship team. For more information, contact your district office or the Assemblies of God Foundation at 417-831-4776.

PENTECOSTAL EVANGEL BOOKS RELEASES 50 TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR FOURTH TITLE

Pentecostal Evangel Books' fourth title, *50 Tough Questions*, is scheduled for release this fall in time for the upcoming Christmas season. PE Books, launched 3 years ago, is a co-venture of the *Pentecostal Evangel* and Gospel Publishing House.

Pentecostal Evangel Managing Editor Ken Horn believes *50 Tough Questions* could prove to be as successful as the previous book in this series, *Questions and Answers About the Holy Spirit*, which is now in its third printing. *Tough Questions* deals with many issues facing believers.

"Some of the most popular editions of the *Pentecostal Evangel* have been those dealing with challenging questions," says Horn. "*Tough Questions* is a concise compilation of recent *Evangel* articles that have answered many spiritual concerns. Although this is not meant to be a comprehensive manual, a

topical index is provided in the back of *50 Tough Questions*."

Among the chapters in *Tough Questions*:

- Was Jesus human like me?
- How can I overcome temptation?
- Who wrote the Bible?
- What is heaven like?
- What is hell like?
- Why did God create humans if He

knew some would go to hell?

- How can I deal with my depression?
- If Jesus is returning, what is taking

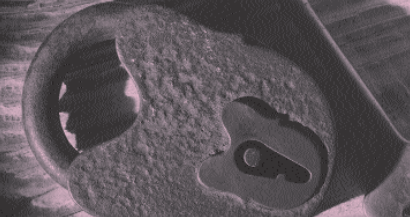
Him so long?

- Is there any hope for my unsaved loved ones?

Available through GPH, *50 Tough Questions* (product #02-3033) is \$6.99 per copy. For more information on any of the PE books, call GPH Customer Services at 1-800-641-4310. The books can also be ordered from the GPH Web site: www.gospelpublishing.com.

911 REMEMBRANCE

The Assemblies of God has endorsed a special outreach called 911 Remembrance Project, a part of Mission America ministries. *Fallen But Not Forgotten*, a 16-page booklet produced by this outreach, has offered a message of hope and encouragement to more than 10 million people. Pastors and churches can purchase booklets by calling 877-648-4336, or by visiting www.911remembrance.com. The cost is 16 cents each, plus shipping and handling, when purchased in bundles of 50. There is a place on the back of the booklets for a church to place its contact information. Churches may want to use this booklet in conjunction with an anniversary memorial service on Wednesday, September 11. This booklet, along with proper ministry, can have a tremendous impact on America at this time. See 911 Remembrance ad on page 46 of this issue. **e**



in closing

BY WES BARTEL



From Dread to Discipleship

It seems strange, almost unbelievable that an entire culture could come to dread a specific day of the week. However, that is exactly what happened in England during the last half of the 18th century. Instead of a time of inspiration and rest, Sunday had become a day that brought fear and dread to the hearts of the adult population.

The reason was simple: It was the only day the children had off. Children worked in the factories for 6 days, and Sunday was the only day they could release their pent-up mischief. Many of these children had grown up without any traditional social and religious ties, and it was obvious in the way they acted.

Robert Raikes, owner and publisher of the *Gloucester Journal*, had observed firsthand the destructive nature of these children and decided that some means of teaching them must be found or many of them would end up in prison. Traditional education was not possible due to the horrible working conditions and child-labor practices of that time.

This godly man established a school for these children to attend on Sundays. His curriculum was the Bible. He hired four women to teach children how to read from it. Soon he was ministering to over 100 children from 6 to 14 years of age. Sunday school had begun.

Did it make a difference? You decide. The character of the children changed dramatically. The swearing, rudeness, and incorrigible behavior were replaced

by a sense of responsibility. The children developed a desire to learn.

One of the factory owners commented on this transformation: "The change could not have been more extraordinary, in my opinion, had they been transformed from the shape of wolves and tigers to that of men." The crime rate dropped sharply. By 1792, not one criminal defendant appeared before the judge where before there would have been as many as 100 cases.

In 1788, John Wesley communicated to a friend, "I verily think these Sunday schools are one of the noblest specimens of charity which have been set on foot in England since William the conqueror."

The story of Sunday school is amazing and impressive. The danger, however, is for the church to focus on Sunday school's past value. Most pastors and church leaders will acknowledge that Sunday school has served a noble and useful function in moving people from dread to discipleship. For over 200 years churches have depended on Sunday school as the primary tool in communicating biblical principles and truth.

The question we face is one of relevance to today's culture. Is what Robert Raikes began in England still an effective ministry model within the church? Or is it a relic of the past and in need of being replaced with newer, more creative programs?

Sunday school still works. It is still one of the largest, most effective

discipleship ministries of the church. It is a ministry embraced by 94 percent of our churches and is by far the strongest assimilation tool we have. Our society and our churches have never been in greater need of the ministry of Sunday school than they are today.

We face some formidable challenges. The Sunday school has been significantly impacted by trends within our culture such as, a declining number of volunteers, time constraints on church members, and decreasing social interaction among people. Added to this is the fact we are becoming an increasingly pagan, post-Christian nation. Quite frankly, Sunday school is dying on the vine in many of our churches. This should cause concern for every pastor who believes in the teaching ministry of the local church. However, these are not insurmountable problems. They are problems that can be solved by creativity, innovation, vision, and prayer.

Before we begin relegating Sunday school to the history books, we need to reassess what we are mandated by God to accomplish within the church. I think we will find that nothing really has been very successful in replacing what Robert Raikes began in 1780. We can still move people from dread to discipleship through the ministry of Sunday school. **e**

Wes Bartel is national Sunday School Ministries director for the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.

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