



Praying like Jesus 30



The power of a praying church 36

enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers ■ Spring 2011

Our Father
TEACH US TO
PRAY
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
Thy Kingdom



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Spirit-filled ministers

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Next Time in enrichment:

Sex and the Church: The Conversations We Need to Have

Today's sexual culture is invading the church. Teens, young single adults, and even senior adults have bought into today's sexual revolution, and while they seemingly live godly lives, in private, things are much different.

How can pastors address the pressing, but sometimes embarrassing "sex" issues? Some choose to ignore teaching or preaching biblical values concerning sex. Others, when they do preach on sexual issues, only condemn those who may be struggling with such issues. As difficult as it might be, pastors must address contemporary issues and provide hope and healing for those caught in the web of sexual sin and temptation. Bob Burbee, Andrew Comiskey, Joe Dallas, Richard D. Dobbins, Shannon Ethridge, Robert A.J. Gagnon, Cindy Erwin, Ed Stetzer, William M. Struthers, and others provide pastors encouragement and practical advice for addressing sex in the church.



THE CULTURE CHRONICLES

GROWING UP WITH GOOGLE AND BOTTLED WATER

This year's high school and college grads are children of the late eighties and early nineties, often considered the end of the Modern Age and the dawn of the Postmodern Age. During their childhood, ethnic conflicts abounded and wracked the globe, and terrorist attacks threatened international peace. The House of Representatives impeached President Bill Clinton following a sex scandal with a White House intern, Nelson Mandela was released from a South African jail to become the first black president in South African history, and Germany was reunited.

But while this year's grads probably not remember these historical events surrounding the years shortly after their birth, they grew up with these cultural touchstones — compiled by Beloit College and published on their website as "Mindset List for the Class of 2014." For this year's graduates: iPhones and Blackberries are a must-have, e-mail is just too slow, and writing in cursive is a lost art. Colorful lapel ribbons have always been worn to support a cause, DNA fingerprinting has always existed, and cross burning has always been deemed protected speech. "Viewer Discretion" has always been an available warning on TV shows, Russians and Americans have always been living together in space, and Nirvana is on the classic oldies station. Water comes in bottles, presidential inaugurations have always featured rock bands, and Google is a verb.

Culture is constantly evolving, much like the way we get news or read books. Do not assume your younger audience understands the world the same way you do.

SUSY FLORY, Castro Valley, California



REFLECTIONS

Something's Bugging Me

"Search me, O God. . . See if there is any offensive way in me" (Psalm 139:23,24). While I was reading a biblical devotion online one day, a message popped up from my computer antivirus program: "Warning, your virus protection is out of date. Click here to update." Most of us who own computers have an antivirus program.

It protects our computers from harmful viruses. Sometimes we fail to update the program and a virus infects our computer.

Like my computer, I am virus prone, too. I still make mistakes and download the wrong things. God knows we are human and that our hearts are prone to infection by spiritual bugs — pride, unforgiveness, anger, gossip, and selfishness. How many times have I allowed chronic discontentment or an addiction to worldly lifestyles enter my life and bug me? Sometimes I dismiss the warning by clicking on "remind me again later." I convince myself I will handle it later. When our hearts get infected, our sensitivity to love and serve others is blocked.

Like the antivirus program that detects and fixes the threats to my computer, God's Spirit has the power to search my heart and cleanse it from the threats to my spiritual health and service. We need to continually ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts, minds, and actions. Then, with God's help, we can change what needs to be changed and reflect the example of Christ in our life and ministry.

PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri



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LEADING THE WAY



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Next to integrity, vision is arguably the most important aspect of leadership. Vision is seeing the future and blazing a trail toward it. Without a vision there is no need for a leader.

A strong, believable vision creates excitement, and excitement creates enthusiasm. Enthusiasm creates energy, and energy creates inertia. It is easier to lead enthusiastic people with inertia than those without any momentum. Leaders with vision create their own momentum.

Will you commit to follow someone who does not know where he is going? Will you have a greater level of confidence following someone who only knows the next step or someone who has an entire plan mapped out?

Proverbs 29:18 states, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained" (NASB¹). We can interpret unrestrained as impotent and uncontrollable. Trying to lead people under these conditions is similar to herding

cats. It cannot be done.

There are two ways to describe vision. The first is tangible sight. The things we see each day. We know they exist because we can touch and smell them. We do not need faith.

The second type, leadership vision, is intangible — an imaginary place. Successful leaders must have the ability to cast their vision and then cultivate the vision throughout the organization until it becomes part of the culture.

All great accomplishments start with a vision. What are you looking for?

JAMES L. CASTELLANO, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

NOTE

1. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible[®]. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.org).

Culture Wars 2.0

The culture wars of the past decade have certainly created both animosity and clarity about the depth of opinion existing in this nation about what enduring values will sustain us. Sociologist James D. Hunter offers his latest perspective on the continuing challenges Christians face as they attempt to be salt and light in our world. Hunter argues that changing the hearts and minds of individuals will not change a society by itself. He also believes that the public witness of the church today has been overly politicized, neutralizing its influence.

Hunter offers an alternative view that will certainly cause animated response, but it is deeply rooted in a biblical perspective. He questions whether changing culture is really possible or even realistic. He argues that faithful presence by Christians is a more fruitful path.

Hunter describes his proposed new posture as cooperation between individuals and institutions to make disciples and serve the common good. The beneficial consequences that can result give honor to the Creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, and

are a clear indicator of Christians' loving obedience to God and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.

When Christians turn to law, public policy, and politics to vindicate themselves, they have essentially given up on a desire to persuade their opponents. They want the support of the state and its coercive power to rule the day. Hunter argues that this stance for Christians is counterproductive.

Hunter's book has drawn significant rebuttal. A great place to test his observations are to begin with a study of 1 Peter 2:12, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

See James D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

For rebuttals see www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=87822. Accessed September 13, 2010.

BYRON KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri



UPWORDS

Weed and Feed

A beautiful lawn or a carefully manicured golf course is the result of a gardener's careful work. To eliminate weeds that destroy the lawn's uniform appearance, the gardener uses weed killer. To make the grass lush with a

deep green color, the gardener uses fertilizer. We can buy these two elements already mixed in correct proportions — called "weed and feed." With this mixture, one application kills the weeds and spurs the grass' growth. I frequently apply this mixture to my lawn.

God also intends for His Word to accomplish at least two functions every time

we apply it to our lives. The Bible, when read in its entirety, contains just the right formula to eliminate the weeds of sin that so frequently plague us. It also makes the grass of our righteousness flourish to the glory of God.

The Spirit of God, dwelling in every believer, applies the Bible's truths to root out the ungodly things in our lives and, at the same time, perfect the image of Christ in us. The Spirit of God, working through the Word of God, brings us to the place of "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27, NKJV).¹

God's Word works most effectively when applied daily, and unlike fertilizer, there is never any danger of being harmed by applying too much.

JACK AIKEN, Eagle River, Alaska

NOTE

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HOLY LAUGHTER



TOP 10 GREAT THINGS ABOUT BEING IN MINISTRY

10. You can sleep in on Monday mornings.
9. Reading great books is part of sermon research.
8. You can set your own schedule (except for those 3 a.m. emergency runs to the hospital).
7. No heavy lifting.
6. You can sneak home in the afternoon to be with your spouse.
5. Lunch meetings at Applebee's are tax deductible.
4. You can attend your kids' school events.
3. Surfing the net is part of sermon research.
2. Going to local theater productions and community concerts is considered pastoral care.
1. Life is never routine.

These are what I like about ministry. It is never routine. One day you are celebrating the birth of baby, the next day you are back in the same hospital comforting a family who just lost their 96-year-old father. One day you are in your grubbier clothes crawling around in the church attic running mic cables, the next day you are in your Sunday best enjoying the worship band and the new sound system. One day the UPS driver thinks you are the custodian because you are mowing the church lawn, the next day you are the honored guest speaker at a local seminary.

Each day has its up and downs, schedules, and surprises, but never routine.

JAMES N. WATKINS, Upland, Indiana

Read more "Holy Laughter" at www.jameswatkins.com.

FROM BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

A web search on fatherless children reveals an avalanche of data concerning their exponentially higher percentages of emotional and social dysfunction. A 2003 Census Bureau report¹ notes that 27 percent of the 72 million children in the U.S. are in fatherless homes. In his seminal work on attachment theory,² noted psychologist John Bowlby identifies the critical need for a stable and nurturing parental figure between the ages of 6 to 18 months. While simplistic cause and effect observations fall short in fully addressing this issue, it

is safe to say that an absentee father indelibly imprints a distorted image in a child's mind.

Is it any wonder, then, that the image of God as Father is seriously flawed in the minds of those impacted by a detached caregiver? The only image embedded in their psyche to which they can relate elicits pain. Thus, *God as Father* is not truly *God the Father*. Hurting children are everywhere and need reparenting by God. Thus, church leaders need to provide a measure of this restorative ministry by focusing on the truth and beauty of our relationship with a Father like no other, who births us into a new parental lineage, who loves us unconditionally, who repairs our brokenness, and who fulfills our deepest longings.

RANDY WALLS, D.Min., director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

NOTES

1. www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-547.pdf. Accessed September 14, 2010.
2. John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss Series*, 2d ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNITY



WANNA' FIGHT?

I hate conflict. Even after three decades of pastoral leadership, I am surprised when I bring an idea to my church board only to find that some do not agree. Fact: conflict is both necessary and desirable.

Consider that:

Conflict clarifies thinking. Each of us sees life from a limited perspective. When we disagree with one another, we can learn if we will listen to our opponent. Unintended consequences lurk in half-baked ideas.

Conflict creates closer ties. The sparks of disagreement allow us to know the other person's heart and the resulting intimacy makes us much more effective as a team.

Conflict allows for a new, shared idea to be birthed. As we disagree, reevaluate, and adjust, usually neither my idea nor yours prevails.

Tragically, issues such as personal security, pride, the need to control outcomes, or a desire to win turn conflict into war. The Scripture instructs: "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3, NLT). Will we adopt Jesus' humility, which is not to be confused with weakness, lack of conviction, or cowardice?

Honesty, too, is critical. Conflict goes off the rails when people conceal private agendas. God's wisdom teaches us that, "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:25,26). Be sure to limit conflict. Resolve it; don't bury it until another day.

Wanna' fight? If we must have a conflict, remember — it's not about my win, or yours. We belong to Christ. Make conflict constructive. We fight to build His church that does His work in the best way in this world.

JERRY SCOTT, Washington, New Jersey

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THE CULTURE CHRONICLES

Are You Hip and Cool?

My 16-year-old daughter rolls her eyes whenever I joke about being hip and cool. "The fact you say you are hip and cool means you really aren't," she maintains.

The idea of cultivating coolness is an important one for a growing segment of the evangelical church, something author Brett McCracken has dubbed "hipster Christianity" in his recent book by the same name.

Christian hipsters grew up on "contemporary Christian music (CCM), Focus on the Family's *Adventures in Odyssey*, flannel graphs, vacation Bible school, and hysteria about the end times," McCracken said in a recent *Christianity Today* article. Now they are abandoning the trappings of megachurches and the Christian retail industry for what they perceive as a real and relevant vision of church that better meets their needs.

Hipster Christianity is rooted in the Jesus People Movement of the 1960s when trends and relevance became important for evangelicals who yearned to reach adolescents with the gospel. Today, McCracken mentions several characteristics of this movement away from the Christian subculture: first, hipster Christians often use shock value to set themselves apart and appeal to the younger generation. Second, hipster worship pastors eschew contemporary praise choruses and favor old hymns, acoustic style. And last, pastoral messages include themes such as creation care and social justice with an emphasis on the arts. Hipster Christians cultivate edginess and that might just mean getting inked or meeting for Bible study in a microbrewery.

SUSY FLORY, Castro Valley, California



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MY HOMEPAGE



1. **Pictures, pictures, pictures.** A picture is worth a thousand words. Pictures personalize your site.
2. **Stories, stories, stories.** The most visited link on our website is "Our Story." Your website needs to tell a story.
3. **Less is more.** Keep your site simple.
4. **Keep redesigning.** The process of redesign never ends.
5. **Sign-up.** One key to a good website is building a network of e-mail subscribers. Offer a free subscription to your weekly evotional, an e-mail version of your weekend message.
6. **Personality.** Make sure your webpage matches your personality. All websites are created equal: 72 dots per inch. But it's how you "connect the dots" that will get people from your website to your physical gathering.
7. **Word of mouse.** We produce trailers and evites for all of our sermon series. Then we e-mail our evotional subscribers and encourage them to invite a friend to church. It's simple. And word of mouse is exponential.
8. **Add ear candy and eye candy.** You need to do something to differentiate your website. A little "surfing music" is one way of enhancing the experience. Post videos so your web visitors can watch them again or forward them to a friend.
9. **Add a webcast and/or podcast.** One way to keep people coming back to your website is fresh content. Upload your messages so people can listen to them or watch them online.
10. **Enter the blogosphere.** A blog makes your website dynamic and interactive.

MARK BATTERSON, Washington, D.C.

IRON SHARPENS IRON

Accountability Partners

Accountability partnership is teaming up with someone to do what Proverbs 27:17 describes:

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Accountability partners hold each other accountable for progress, life choices, ministry, personal growth, and any other desired areas.

Seek to become the right person for an accountability relationship. The virtues you need include trust (able to keep confidences), availability, good listening skills, discernment, encourager, speak truth with love, not jealous, compatible personalities, and able to correct in a way acceptable to each other. You should also believe in each other's goals and visions.

Once you find an accountability partner, establish ground rules and regular meeting times. You may want to start with a friendly chat to catch up on personal lives or you may prefer a meeting with an agenda. Suggested guidelines include:

- Focus on one person at a time, but allow time for both.
- Note the partner's hectic days on your calendar and commit to pray for him on those days.
- Review past goals and progress.
- Discuss obstacles to progress and brainstorm ways to move forward.
- Discuss frustrations since the last meetings and possible solutions.
- Discuss any new desires and goals.
- Plan steps to achieve goals and hold each other accountable for the next step.
- Discuss action steps to take before your next meeting and set deadlines.

Consider ways to encourage your partner between meetings (e-mails, notes, calls) and commit to decisions made so you can both thrive and grow.

KAREN H. WHITING, author and speaker



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YOUNG LEADER

"Is there a burning in your preaching?" These words echoed across the radio and into my soul one day as I drove to the office. The words came from a well-known ministry leader to a group of pastors. He counseled us to include more of the prophetic in our preaching, to be unafraid to stir the pot, to challenge people to move beyond their comfort level.

This is a particular challenge to my generation, especially if we are new to pulpit ministry. We want to ease our way in, making sure we do not unnecessarily offend or insult those who have entrusted us to lead them.

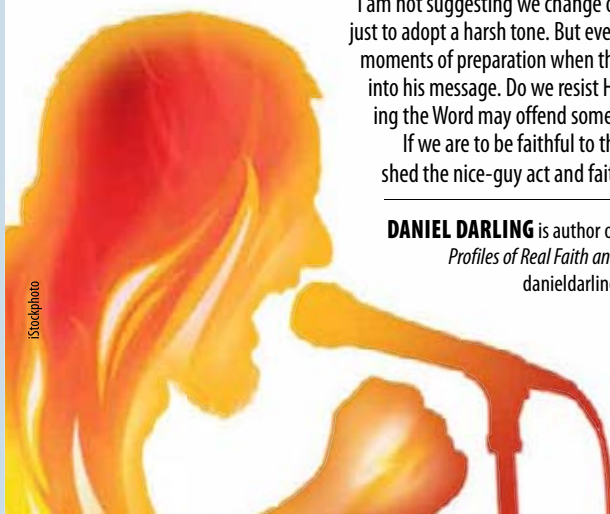
We are also guided, at times, by our own church experiences. Those who grew up in traditions known for a weekly diet of fire-and-brimstone may fear becoming what they have tried to avoid.

But are we in danger of an opposite error? Being too nice? Does our nice-guy act enable spiritual lethargy? Do we ever confront our people with the need to change? Are their hearts ever broken? Do we ever motivate them to move beyond where they are to something more in Christ?

I am not suggesting we change our style or adopt a harsh tone just to adopt a harsh tone. But every young pastor has those quiet moments of preparation when the Spirit urges him to inject fire into his message. Do we resist His call or do we accept it, knowing the Word may offend someone whose approval we seek?

If we are to be faithful to the Word, sometimes we need to shed the nice-guy act and faithfully speak for God.

DANIEL DARLING is author of *Teen People of the Bible: Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith and Tragic Failure*. Visit <http://www.danieldarling.com>



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BOOK IT



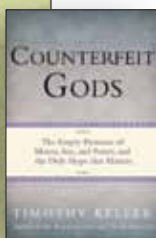
PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY

These words could describe the latest action movie or new television series. Or we might find them on the cover of a popular fiction thriller. Most are surprised to find them linked to German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Save for his classic works, *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, little was known about this man of God . . . until now. Author Eric Metaxas has written a complete biography of this gifted, committed, and courageous spiritual giant. Titled simply *Bonhoeffer* (Thomas Nelson), Metaxas traces Bonhoeffer's entire life, focusing especially on his struggles under Nazism.

In addition to informing and educating readers about Bonhoeffer's life, this well-written book provides several lessons and discussion points for contemporary believers and church leaders. Issues of doctrinal orthodoxy, submission to the government, loyalty to country versus loyalty to God, integration of faith and practice, and others emerge as we see the church accommodate, divide, and even flourish under Nazi tyranny.

Although the nearly 600 pages can seem intimidating, *Bonhoeffer* pulls the reader in and along, revealing the extraordinary faith of this man as he fought to save the church and his nation from the curse of Nazism. As the book flap explains, this book "is the story of a life framed by a passion for truth and a commitment to justice on behalf of those who face implacable evil."



EMPTY PROMISES

All people, especially the young, have dreams about what they would like to gain and achieve. A love relationship, a lucrative career, and a position of influence and power often find their way to one's list of life-goals. Each goal seemingly offers esteem, fulfillment, security, purpose, meaning, and happiness.

These goals can easily become central to our lives and, in effect, become idols. In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller discusses these idols — especially money, sex, and power — what we can do to eliminate them, and "the only hope that matters." Keller sets the tone of the book in the Introduction as he defines idolatry at "taking some incomplete joy of this world and building your entire life on it" (xi). He then explains that in reality, "the human heart is an idol factory" (xiv).

Counterfeit Gods is easy to read and intensely practical. In addition, each chapter centers on an illustrative and instructive story from the Bible. This would make an excellent resource and topic for a 7- or 8-week adult Sunday School class or small group study.

DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois

UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE



LIVING LIFE IN RESPONSE OR REACTION?

Most of us will experience a bruised heart at some point in life. Some are a result of living in a fallen world, poor

choices or circumstances; others by sin — our own or someone else's. Some bruises come through those we endeavor to serve. Regardless of the cause, bruises can remain hidden until the right set of circumstances, the appropriate amount of pressure, or the perfect personality comes along, and the pain surfaces. Its presence acts as a wakeup call that it is time to begin the process of forgiveness, healing, and restoration.

When someone bruises our heart, our perspective can become tainted; we are more likely to develop a belief system apart from God and miss the deeper revelation of truth found in a person or situation. Instead of responding as God desires, we react as our bruised heart directs. For me, it happened as I wallowed in irritation when a friend showed me his prize iris patch. God revealed that my anger was tied to my estranged father's love for irises. For years I had never fully appreciated the true beauty of the iris; never able to respond to it as God intended.

God lovingly uncovers our bruised hearts so He can heal them. Without receiving God's healing and restoration, our misguided beliefs and opinions fuel our reactions in life. God desires that we respond to life based on His perspective, His guidance, His love, and His wisdom and to help others we lead do the same.

PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri

FAITH & PRAYER

The Real Threat of PAGAN CHRISTIANITY

Blogger Brandon O'Brien recently observed that attempts to control God through our prayers can indicate how pagan Christianity can become. Pagan religions have a tendency to facilitate relationships between gods and adherents that are often manipulative. To keep the balance of power, people need to sacrifice, perform rituals, or repeat incantations that appease the gods. Religious systems are set up to control the power of the deities.

O'Brien argues that biblical Christianity is just the opposite: the relationship between God and humans is not based on rite, ritual, or manipulation. Instead, it is a religion based on a covenant between God and His people that is evident most clearly in God's gracious desire to love us in Christ.

As followers of Jesus, we are tempted to try to please God in our prayer life. We think that if we appease His anger over our sins, God will finally

behave the way we want Him to. It is easy to fall into a trap of thinking in terms of how we can create a prayer life that will get God to act.

Could it be that prayer is so difficult because it reveals our desire to control things in life? We want things to go well in life: health, success in our ministry, and vibrant family life are reasonable and hopeful expectations. But prayer that allows biblical Christianity to dominate our lives is trusting that God will make "our hopes" reality — not because of what we do — but because of God's love for us in Christ. That love is by grace, not our manipulative prayer.

BYRON KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

SOURCE

See www.outofur.com/archives/2010/09/the_real_threat.html. Accessed September 13, 2010.

BEYOND THE WALLS



Tips for Inviting Someone to Church

According to Barna Research Group, one out of four unchurched people would attend church if a friend invited them.¹ So what is stopping your congregation from extending an invitation? Perhaps we all feel awkward at times. Here are five helpful tips:

1. **Earn the right to invite.** Sometimes spur-of-the-moment invitations work, but other times blurting, "Wanna go to church?" when you first meet someone gives the impression you only care about attendance goals. Taking the time to build a friendship communicates you want to share an important part of your life.
2. **Instead of asking, "Do you want to go?" invite her to come.** If she feels you are only going to church to take her, she will likely say no. Saying, "Want to come with me?" communicates you are going whether she comes or not.
3. **Give guests an idea of what to expect.** Will the service be formal or informal? Loud or low-key?
4. **Give your guest an idea of what to wear.** It is embarrassing to stand out in a crowd, so tell him what you will wear and how most other people at your church dress.
5. **Arrange to find each other.** Offer to pick up your friend at home, meet for coffee or breakfast before the service, or plan to meet in the parking lot so you can enter the church together.

Inviting others to church is important because it is one step toward inviting them to meet the Savior.

DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

NOTE

1. George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990), 137

UTHTRAX

Ignore or Invest?

According to the just released **Copenhagen Puberty Study**¹, the onset age of puberty continues to take a significant decline in tween girls. What does this mean for the youth pastor ministering to today's rising middle schoolers?

Girls who mature faster may experience sexual advances from older boys before they are emotionally ready. If they are more developed than their peers, depression or eating disorders can result.

Exacerbating the problem, you may have parents who do not want their "little girl" to grow up so they are unconsciously missing maturation clues.

Where do you fit in? You need to press in on issues such as self-esteem, unconditional love, and significance from Christ early and continually. Media broadcasts daily speak messages that scream empty sources for these important attributes. We must not make the mistake of assuming our students know the truth and have heard it early or often enough.

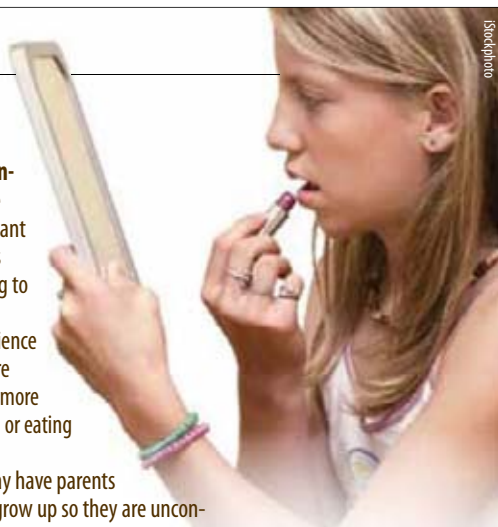
Consider investing significantly in the lives of young girls in the very important transitional years of 5th and 6th grade. Small groups just for girls in this age group can be a great place for these girls to have a safe place to discuss their fears as well as new experiences that are coming their way while providing a biblical foundation for the years to come.

Helpful Resource: Dannah Gresh and Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Lies Young Women Believe and the Truth That Sets Them Free* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008).

LYNN COWELL, Charlotte, North Carolina

SOURCE

1. "Recent Decline in Age at Breast Development: The Copenhagen Puberty Study." <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/123/5/e932>. Accessed September 9, 2010.



WHAT IN THE WORLD

CONSIDER THE DANDELIONS OF THE FIELD

Somewhere along the line lilies ended up being deemed the official flower of Easter.

Easter lilies are white, which speaks of the joy and brilliance of the Easter message. The pure white bloom suggests the spotless robe of righteousness in which we are clothed by virtue of Jesus' death and resurrection. The trumpet-shape of the lily fits the biblical story of dazzling white angels trumpeting the good news of an empty tomb. But I am not so sure the lily is the best flower to represent the message of Jesus' defeat of death. For one thing, Easter lilies do not naturally bloom at Easter. They need to be "fooled" into blooming in the spring by being cultivated in an artificial environment. Also, Easter lilies do not last very long. Just a few days after they fill the church on Easter, they look worn, wilted, and dying. Hardly the picture of eternal life.

Now consider the often-maligned dandelion. Think about how that bright yellow bloom calls to mind the Christian message. First, it speaks of God's initiating love. You did not plant dandelion bulbs or seeds to get them to grow in your backyard. Regardless of what you do, they just show up. They are a picture of grace. They are also a picture of the power of Christ over death. Dandelions are seemingly indestructible. Pull them up by the roots and they refuse to stay dead. Within a few days they reappear. They are relentless. They have a life of their own. The dandelion is so determined to grow that it will move rocks, blacktop, and even cement to reach the light of day. Like the Christ of Easter, dandelions are death-defying.

GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington



Joshua's Story: Reaching Those Who Have Walked Away From the Faith

BY JOEL T. PERTTULA

Joshua is typical of many young people today. He says, "There were several reasons why I left the church. First, when I was in church, I felt like a sardine in a can; too many nameless faces. Second, I got tired of the superficiality I saw all around me. Third, the preaching from the pulpit on Sunday made no sense whatsoever to the rest of my life. In all honesty, I just grew tired of the weekly show. Today I'd much rather consult with a psychic or friends who are into Wicca for answers to everyday life rather than go to church."

How does the church respond to young people like Joshua? According to Joel Perttula, "Our challenge is not to abandon the people God places in our lives once they stop attending church. On the contrary, we must pursue them even more with the radical love of Jesus, no matter where they are on their spiritual journey."

The New Town Square Is in the Palm of Your Hand

BY DOUGLAS PLANK

The town square has played an important role in the cities of America as a place for sharing information and fellowship. People often gathered there for social events and to catch up on the latest news. But the historic town square has been replaced by a mobile town square. "And, just like the more traditional town square, the new mobile town square has vendors, shops, and various commercial interests popping up and surrounding it — creating an economy of commerce, philanthropy, and influence," states author Douglas Plank.

According to Plank, "If the church does not act quickly and with clear intention, it will miss huge opportunities to further its support, both monetarily and ultimately the loyalty of those it serves." Learn how your church can have a place in this new town square.



Why Should I Study the Old Testament?

BY J. BIRNEY DIBBLE

Has someone in your church ever asked you, "What value is the study of the Old Testament for Christians?" How did you answer? Aside from quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 or 1 Corinthians 10:11, what advice can you give someone who questions the value of studying the Old Testament?

J. Birney Dibble has evaluated the value of the Old Testament for today's Christian. One of the most compelling reasons is the fact, "In Genesis God establishes our identity, origins, purpose, and destiny." Studying this book of beginnings will open the door to a fuller understanding of the Old Testament and our destiny in Christ.



The Holy Spirit Versus "Another Gospel": Church History, 1000 to 1550 A.D. (Part 1)

BY LYNN D. KANGA

"By the year 1000, the simple gospel had accumulated extensive ecclesiastical baggage. No longer was there only one mediator between God and man. The spiritually penitent had to seek the intervention of a priest — whether the priest was moral or not — by means of the confessional. And the priest, as the 'representative of Christ,' assumed the right to 'absolve' the sins of the sinner or — as an alternative — require acts of penance, often in the form of monetary gifts to the Church," states author Lynn Kanga.

Kanga also states, "It is not surprising that the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts were particularly vulnerable, given the general moral decadence of the time." In this article Kanga provides a chronological, detailed account of church history showing how God used godly men to stand firm for the truth.



Trains that miss their signals can end up in a jagged pile of metal as they collide with each other. In the same way, pastors who leave or enter places of ministry can either cause peace and tranquility or carnage.

The author, in this insightful article, talks about the proper way to leave and enter ministry assignments. According to Von Kanel, the three questions every pastor needs to ask before entertaining thoughts of changing churches are: "How is my relationship with God? How well and I and my present church? How well am I answering the tough questions?" The answer to these questions will help you navigate the changes in ministry locations. "Knowing when to leave the old and how to enter the new will result in pleasant memories from the past and realistic anticipation for the future," states Von Kanel.



MOST EVANGELICAL LEADERS REFRAIN FROM IMBIBING

Three out of five evangelical leaders do not drink socially, according to a survey by the National Association of Evangelicals of denominational officials, parachurch ministry heads, university administrators, and missions directors.

"Alcohol and its effects have been a major challenge in American society," says NAE President Leith Anderson. "Just as society has dealt with it, as evidenced in the 18th and 21st amendments, so have evangelicals looked at how to appropriately interact with alcohol."

Of course, most Holiness and Pentecostal ministers abstain from drinking alcohol because of denominational stances demanding teetotalism.

Among those who attend church weekly, 46 percent reported never drinking alcohol.

"While we understand one cannot defend [alcohol abstinence] biblically, we have chosen to raise the standard for leadership in our movement," says Jeff Farmer, president of Open Bible Churches.

Others argue that curtailing all drink is wise because of the potential for abuse.

"Even though there is no prohibition on the moderate alcohol consumption in Scripture, due to the many implications as an example to family and those I serve, I like Paul's words (Romans 14:21), 'It is better not to,'" says Gary Benedict, president of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Some surveyed cited alcoholism in their families, a desire not to be a stumbling block to others, and the damaging toll alcohol addiction has had on society as reasons to refrain from imbibing.

Many of the 40 percent of leaders who do drink alcohol added that they do so in moderation, never in excess, only on special occasions, rarely, or infrequently.

A recent Gallup Poll showed that overall 33 percent of Americans do not use alcoholic beverages. Among those who attend church weekly, 46 percent reported never drinking alcohol, according to Gallup. Eighty percent of atheists say they drink.

The Assemblies of God traditionally has opposed the consumption of alcohol in any form. "We urge all believers to avoid the satanic tool of alcohol, which destroys lives, damns souls, and blights society," declares a Fellowship statement on abstinence adopted in 1985.

Recovery Ministry Focuses on Pastors



In the 9 years since he founded Operation Integrity (OI) as a 12-step recovery

group for men addicted to pornography, David Zailer has seen more and more pastors participate in the confidential meetings. While sex addiction causes shame and guilt for most Christian men, it's even more debilitating for ministers, who may face immediate dismissal if they admit to having a problem.

Seeing that few pastors felt comfortable confessing their sexual sins among laity, the Monarch Beach, Calif.-based OI began facilitating separate meetings just for clergy.

"Addiction grows in the dank, dark places of isolation, and no one is immune," Zailer told *Enrichment* journal. "It begins with a behavioral struggle that is too embarrassing to admit. Hidden away from the light of community and relationship, these struggles progress over time and become serious problems."

Now, Zailer has decided to transition OI into an anonymous recovery ministry primarily for pastors, also broadening the scope beyond porn to include other addictive behaviors from gambling to prescription painkillers. Zailer, author of *When Lost Men Come Home*, knows the topic well. He is a former porn, alcohol, and crack cocaine

addict. He now is a full-time addiction recovery counselor.

"Part of this development happened because we have attracted a number of pastors who found themselves with few Christian resources and fellowship to address their addictions," Zailer says. "Working with pastors who have been derailed by their addictions became an unexpected challenge for me, one that brought me great joy."

Zailer knows from personal experience that some people have a proclivity to multiple addictions. When he would get his sexual obsession under control, he suddenly had urges to drink. Only when broken before God — and other men — did he begin to heal.

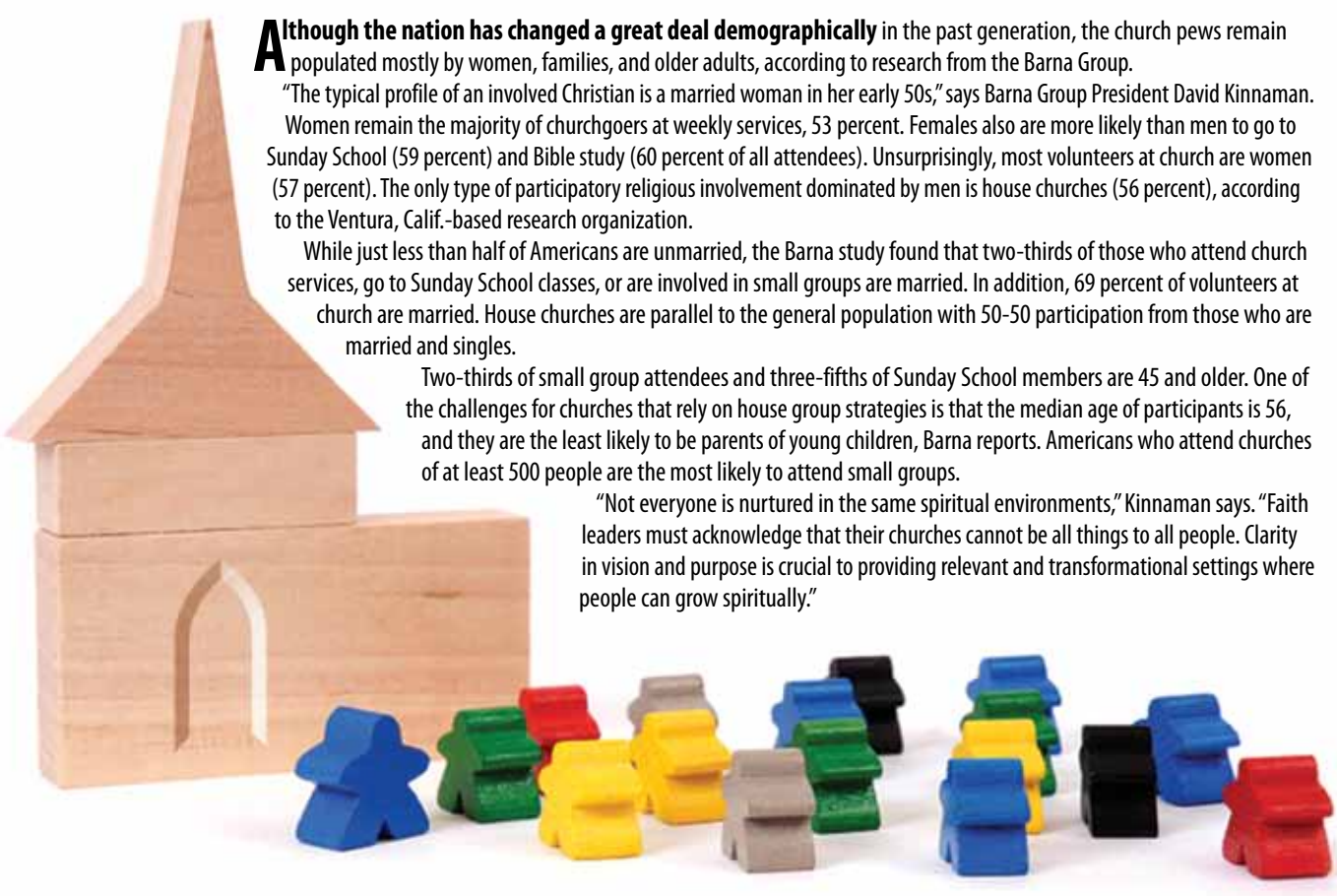
Some pastors may be more susceptible to addictive behaviors because much of the nature of their job is stressful and done in isolation. He hopes OI can be a safe resource for those who feel desperate.

"Sadly, in cultures that are permeated with institutional and religious perfectionism, our pastors find themselves in positions where admitting personal struggles leads to censure and criticism, admitting problems leads to discipline and dismissal, and admitting to an addiction is most certainly the kiss of death," Zailer says.

Zailer hopes to point ministry leaders to be honest with themselves, their families, and their churches as steps toward healing. For more information, see <http://www.operationintegrity.org/>.

Images: iStockphoto

No Surprises in Who's Going to Church

A large wooden toy church with a pointed roof and an arched doorway stands on the left. To its right, a collection of colorful wooden blocks in various shapes (stars, squares, rectangles) are scattered on a white surface.

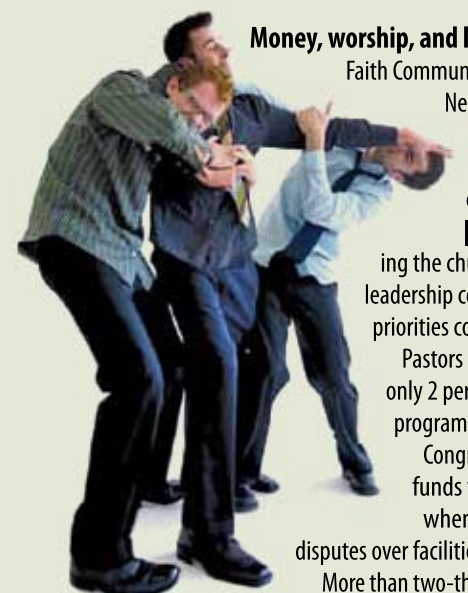
Although the nation has changed a great deal demographically in the past generation, the church pews remain populated mostly by women, families, and older adults, according to research from the Barna Group. "The typical profile of an involved Christian is a married woman in her early 50s," says Barna Group President David Kinnaman. Women remain the majority of churchgoers at weekly services, 53 percent. Females also are more likely than men to go to Sunday School (59 percent) and Bible study (60 percent of all attendees). Unsurprisingly, most volunteers at church are women (57 percent). The only type of participatory religious involvement dominated by men is house churches (56 percent), according to the Ventura, Calif.-based research organization.

While just less than half of Americans are unmarried, the Barna study found that two-thirds of those who attend church services, go to Sunday School classes, or are involved in small groups are married. In addition, 69 percent of volunteers at church are married. House churches are parallel to the general population with 50-50 participation from those who are married and singles.

Two-thirds of small group attendees and three-fifths of Sunday School members are 45 and older. One of the challenges for churches that rely on house group strategies is that the median age of participants is 56, and they are the least likely to be parents of young children, Barna reports. Americans who attend churches of at least 500 people are the most likely to attend small groups.

"Not everyone is nurtured in the same spiritual environments," Kinnaman says. "Faith leaders must acknowledge that their churches cannot be all things to all people. Clarity in vision and purpose is crucial to providing relevant and transformational settings where people can grow spiritually."

BIGGEST BATTLES ARE MONEY, WORSHIP, AND LEADERSHIP

Three men in business attire are shown in a physical struggle. One man is being pushed or thrown by the other two, who are leaning against each other. The scene is dynamic and suggests conflict.

Money, worship, and leadership are the top three reasons for congregation fights, according to a recent Faith Communities Today (FACT) report compiled by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Nearly three out of four congregations in the past 5 years has had a serious conflict concerning finances, worship, leadership, or program priorities.

FACT found that 74 percent of congregations had experienced conflict in the latest study covering a 5-year span, compared to 75 percent in 2000.

Conflict about leadership is the most likely to produce serious fallout, with laypeople leaving the church as the most common response. The study found that 18 percent of laity had left over leadership concerns, compared to 14 percent for worship conflicts, 8 percent for both budget and program priorities concerns, and 4 percent complaining about facilities.

Pastors are more likely to stick it out. While 5 percent departed because of a dispute over leadership, only 2 percent quit over finances, and just 1 percent took off due to battles over worship, facilities, or programs.

Congregants generally do not stop contributing if they are upset. Only 6 percent of laity withheld funds when they question the church budget, 5 percent when upset with leadership, 4 percent when they dislike the worship, 2 percent when they dislike program priorities, and 1 percent in disputes over facilities.

More than two-thirds of churches, 67 percent, reported only one major conflict in the past 5 years. But 16 percent cited two conflicts, 10 percent reported major clashes, and 5 percent had four disputes. Amazingly, 2 percent of congregations had tension over all five areas of budgeting, worship, leadership, program priorities, and facilities. 🌀

ISRAEL:

You'll Never Be the Same Again

By Rick Knoth

uxtaposed between Africa and Asia stands the most fascinating and significant area of the world wherein were played out the most transcendent events in human history.

This narrow strip of land, known as Israel, has retained its prominence throughout the millennia and is, to this day, profoundly venerated for its topography and antiquities. It is a place long shrouded in mystery, intrigue, and drama, whose stories of human triumph and tragedy have graced the record of biblical history for thousands of years.

The unfolding drama of Israel's truculent history continues to this day, bringing with it increased international and media attention. This land that provides authenticity to Jesus' life and ministry remains enmeshed in religious and political turmoil. At its very core, Israel is the most religious nation in the world, being home to the world's three major religious groups: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Consequently, it is a nation yet to find its true identity.

Because of its religious moorings, Israel remains a popular tourist spot. Believers in Christ will find no greater place than Israel where their faith intersects more closely and meaningfully with the record of Scripture. Visitors, whose faith is grounded in the Lands of the Bible, are making spiritual pilgrimages to Israel in record number.

According to the nation's Central Bureau of Statistics, 3.45 million tourists visited Israel in 2010, setting a new all-time high for incoming tourism. Israel's Ministry of Tourism's slogan, "You'll Never Be the Same Again," is more than a slogan; it is a reality for millions of believers whose lives have been transformed by the land that gives both discourse to the Bible and authenticity to their Christian faith.

I have been an Assemblies of God minister for over 25 years and have traveled outside the U.S. on numerous occasions, either for pleasure or ministry. Unfortunately, a trip to the Lands of the Bible was never in reach — that is until recently. In May of 2010, Israel's Ministry of Tourism invited a small group of evangelical journalists to enjoy a 7-day whirlwind excursion of the Holy Land. That trip, filled with sights and sounds, cities and hamlets, temples and palaces, and where the past merges with the present connected me with the roots of my faith in a way that was truly life changing. Although the trip is now but a memory, the experience it etched on my heart and mind will last forever. Truly, once you have been to Israel you will never be the same.

Having provided this prologue, I invite you to journey with me in your imagination as I share a few highlights of my trip. For some, this journey will be a common experience, for you, too, have had a soul-moving experience in the Lands of the Bible. For those

who have not, I trust this abbreviated journey provides the inspiration and motivation that will make a trip to the Holy Land, the most amazing strip of land on the earth, a priority for your life and ministry.

Day 1, Arrival

On arrival at Ben Gurion International Airport, just outside of Tel Aviv, a representative of the Ministry of Tourism and our tour guide, Amir Orly, meets us. With the van loaded, we drive up the Mediterranean Coast to the Roman port city Caesarea, where we check-in at the Dan Hotel and later enjoy an evening meal at a restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.



Day 2, Mediterranean Coast and Lower Galilee

Our journey begins with a visit to the Caesarea National Park, the great Roman port city and former Roman capital. Caesarea is one of the largest archaeological digs in Israel. Here the ruins of the Roman theater, hippodrome, bathhouse, and great aqueduct built by King Herod are carefully preserved. Biblically, Caesarea is where Peter baptized the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Cornelius became the first Gentile convert to Christianity (Acts 10). It is also the site of the apostle Paul's trial before Festus (Acts 25).

Photos by Rick Knoth





From Caesarea, our journey moves us north to Tel Megiddo, an ancient fortified city built by King Solomon and situated at the crossroads of the Jezreel Valley — site of the Battle of Armageddon. The excavations of this giant fortress reveal the ruins of 26 ancient civilizations superimposed one upon another. A short distance from Megiddo is Mount Carmel where Elijah battled the prophets of Baal.

Crossing the beautiful and fertile Jezreel Valley, we arrive in Nazareth, the largest Arab town in Israel and

boyhood home of Jesus. Visitors to Nazareth typically visit the Basilica of the Annunciation, which commemorates the announcement of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary of the birth of Jesus, and the Synagogue Church, where Jesus preached from the Book of Isaiah.

From Nazareth, we travel east toward Tiberias where off in the distance stands Mount Tabor, site of the Transfiguration. Tiberias is a nearly 2,000-year old historical resort town on the Sea of Galilee built by Herod Antipas to honor Tiberius Caesar. Set in

beautiful and extensive gardens with glorious views of the Sea of Galilee and the Golan Heights is the Scots Hotel St. Andrew, our resting place for the next two evenings.

Day 3, Around the Sea of Galilee

From Tiberias we progress north along the north-western edge of Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee) to visit a number of important Christian holy sites, towns, and villages. A substantial part of Jesus' Galilee ministry took place on the Sea of Galilee and surrounding countryside. Here He walked on water, calmed the storm, and taught from Peter's boat. Capernaum, where Peter lived, became Jesus' base of operation and from where He preached in the synagogue and performed many miracles. Among the many ruins in Capernaum is Israel's best-preserved 4th-century synagogue, built on the remains of the "synagogue of Jesus."

Near Capernaum, a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee in a replica wooden sailing vessel from the time of Jesus provides beautiful, picturesque views of Capernaum and the entire northern Galilee countryside.

To the north of Capernaum and near Korazim is the Mount of Beatitudes, the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. The flora-filled gardens on the Mount of Beatitudes provide a striking backdrop to some of the best views of the Sea of Galilee and surrounding area. To commemorate Jesus' sermon, the black-domed Church of the Beatitudes provides visitors a sacred place for prayer and solitude.

A short distance from the Mount of Beatitudes and to the south is Tabgha, the site of the traditional location of the miracle of the loaves and fish and Jesus' post-resurrection appearance. The Churches of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish and St. Peter's Primacy are important sites commemorating these events. Following our visit to Tabgha, we enjoy a traditional St. Peter's fish lunch at a nearby restaurant on the Sea of Galilee.

A side trip to the Yigal Alon Museum at Ginosar offers visitors a close-up view of the remains of a first-century wooden fishing boat dating to the time of Jesus.

Following dinner at Pagoda, a Chinese restaurant at the Lido Galilee Compound, we retire for the evening at the Scots Hotel St. Andrew, Tiberias.

Day 4, Kursi, Yardenit baptismal site, Jordan Valley, and Dead Sea Region

Circumventing the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee with views of the Golan Heights our tour arrives at Kursi National Park, located east of the Sea of Galilee, 7 kilometers north of Ein Gev. Based on Christian tradition, Kursi is the site of the Miracle of the Swine mentioned in Luke 8:26–39, described as "the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee" (verse 26).

From Kursi, our journey continues to the southern most end of the Sea of Galilee to a popular baptismal site for Christian pilgrims — Kibbutz

AG CENTER FOR HOLY LANDS STUDIES; A NEW EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Photo by Rick Knott

By Marc Turnage

When did the Center for Holy Lands Studies begin and why?

The Center for Holy Lands Studies began in December 2009 through an initial generous gift from the late Dr. Daniel and Bonnie Sheaffer. The Center has been a long-term vision of General Superintendent George O. Wood. Dr. Wood has led trips to the lands of the Bible for over 30 years and desired that young ministers and ministerial students would have opportunity to travel to the lands of the Bible early in their ministry and education because of the foundational impact studying the Bible in context has on one's preaching and teaching.

What is the mission of the Center for Holy Lands Studies?

The mission of the Center for Holy Lands Studies is to revolutionize biblical education, uniquely resource Bible study, reinforce biblical preaching and theology, and renew the spiritual experience of the ministers, educators, students, and laity of the Assemblies of God through an educational and interactive

encounter in the lands of the Bible. To our knowledge, we are the first Christian group in the history of Christianity to launch a comprehensive initiative like this.

How does the Center work?

There are three aspects to the Center for Holy Lands Studies: 1) Study trips to the lands of the Bible, 2) a multimedia, multigenerational resource center, and 3) an 8-week summer institute in the land of Israel (our first summer institute is 5 weeks). Let me highlight each of these three parts of the Center.

Trips

We customize trips for different demographics as well as trips with different dynamics. For example, we provide trips for pastors and their parishioners, trips exclusively for ministers, trips for college and university students and professors, and trips for high school students. All of our trips have three components making them unique: pretrip curriculum, the trip itself, and post-trip curriculum and interaction. The goal is to adequately prepare the trip participant for the trip, to provide an exceptional trip experience, and to offer ongoing interaction and

education after the person has returned.

Resource Center

We named the Center for Holy Lands Studies Resource Center in honor of Dr. Robert E. Cooley, long-time educator and minister who has led over 70 trips to the lands of the Bible. The Robert E. Cooley Bible Lands Resource Center is developing multimedia, multi-generational resources — Bible studies, sermon tools, curricular resources, and an online database of resources — that will introduce and enhance the user's study of the Bible and also enable users to teach the Bible's historical, geographical, and cultural contexts. There will be resources for pastors, Sunday school teachers, students, teachers, and laypersons.

Summer Institute

The Center for Holy Lands Studies has partnered with Kinneret College, an Israeli college, to offer the first program of its kind in the Galilee — the setting of the majority of Jesus' ministry. This extended program will provide an in-depth learning experience beyond a study trip. It will have two foci: 1) immersion in Hebrew language — learning the biblical language

ISRAEL: *You'll Never Be the Same Again* (continued from page 25)

Kinneret (Yardenit). Here I'm privileged to baptize four members of the group — a moment we will long remember.

We continue south through the Jordan River Valley to the Dead Sea region. Via cable car we ascend Masada to see the excavations of Herod's magnificent mountaintop fortress and site of the last Jewish stand against the Romans in 73 A.D., leading to the mass suicide of its 960 defenders. From here the views of the Dead Sea and Judean Desert region are magnificent.

From Masada we journey north a short distance and make a refreshing stop at the Ein Gedi Beach Spa on the shores of the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth. The healing properties of the natural thermomineral springs and black mud offer a unique and soothing experience for the bon vivants and health conscious. Following an invigorating swim in the Sea and dip in the mineral springs we head toward

Jerusalem, the most sacred site of all.

Passing by Qumran toward Jericho, we turn west and drive the final 14-mile ascent to Jerusalem. At the top of Mount Scopus, with tear-stained eyes, I gain my first panoramic view of the Holy City — the city of the great King.

Days 5 and 6, Jerusalem (Old City) and the City of David

Today the journey begins with a drive to the Mount of Olives, separated from Jerusalem by the deep, narrow Kidron Valley. The Mount of Olives is perhaps the most mentioned and religious mountain in the Bible due to its prominence in Jesus' ministry and the site of end-time biblical prophecy (Zechariah 14:4). Some of the most spectacular views of the Old City are accessible from the western slope of the Mount of Olives, including hallowed views of the ancient Jewish cemetery where the remains of Abshalom, Zechariah, and

others are entombed.

On the upper western slope of the Mount Olives and within range of the natural eye stand three significant churches: the Church of the Ascension (the place where Jesus ascended into heaven), the Church of the Pater Noster (the traditional site where Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer), and the Dominus Flevit Church (Dominus Flevit, which means "the cry of the Lord," commemorates the place where Jesus mourned as He approached Jerusalem, Luke 19:41).

On the lower slope of the Mount of Olives is the secluded Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Jesus agonized in prayer before His betrayal by Judas. The group spent a meaningful time in the Garden for personal reflection and quiet meditation.

On the southwestern edge of the Old City is Mt. Zion. Our trip there included visits to: Saint Peter in Gallicantu Church (site of the palace of the High Priest Caiaphas where Jesus was brought to trial and where

in a unique manner that produces incredible results, and 2) in-depth exposure to the physical setting of the Bible.

We have scheduled our first summer institute for June 9 through July 18, 2011. The focus of the program will be the New Testament. We will teach courses in archaeology of Israel during the New Testament, historical backgrounds of the New Testament, Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman Periods, and Jesus of Nazareth. We will have lectures from world-renowned scholars in archeology, history, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In future years, we will offer tracks of study in Old Testament, archaeology, and biblical languages. We are also working with Kinneret College to design a shorter, 2-week program specifically for ministers.

Students in the summer institute program can earn undergraduate and graduate credit. Our goal is not to compete with our Assemblies of God schools, but rather, to resource them and provide opportunities to their students and faculties that they normally would not have.

How are the Center's trips unique from other trips to the lands of the Bible?

We offer trips for different kinds of groups, of different dynamics, and for varying durations. For example, we offer trips for pastors and their parishioners. If the pastor has never been to the lands of the Bible, we work with him in composing an itinerary and helping him feel comfortable leading his congregation on this trip. We offer opportunities and incentives for smaller-church pastors to unite with other churches

to take a trip to the lands of the Bible. We can organize and coordinate trips for districts as well. We also offer trips specifically for ministers that focus upon two things: 1) a spiritual retreat — a time to recharge one's spirit and renew one's call and 2) using the experience of being in the three-dimensional setting of the Bible to make the minister a stronger preacher and teacher of the Bible.

A person's unique experiences depend on the trip he chooses. In some of our programs, we take jeep rides through a nature reserve on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. These bring alive the virgin landscape of the Galilee as Jesus knew it.

Other groups participate in an archaeological "Dig for a Day" providing them the chance to dig for buried artifacts.

We also have trips that include hiking the newly opened "Jesus Trail" through the Galilee. Trips specifically for high school youth provide the young person opportunity to

hike, ride camels, spend the night in a Bedouin camp, and have a life-changing experience with God in the land of the Bible — a sort of spiritual birthright.

The goal of our trips is to use the three-dimensional space of the Bible as a doorway through which trip participants can enter into the world and thought of the Bible to hear the words of Scripture in its ancient context, but translate it into a 21st-century context. While it is exciting to visit many of the biblical sites, what truly transforms a person is the insight and understanding gained into the Bible and its message. By placing the biblical stories and message in its cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, the

All of our trips have three components: pretrip curriculum, the trip itself, and post-trip curriculum and interaction.

words of the prophets and Jesus speak directly into our world in new and fresh ways.

While we visit Jerusalem, Capernaum, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cairo, Petra, Athens, Istanbul, etc., we often show sides of locations that are not frequently seen. Moreover, we use the sites and their archeology as a portal into the world of the Bible.

Sometimes ministers and laity look at a trip to the Bible lands as a luxury, something you do when you are older and your church is large enough. But a study trip to the lands of the Bible is an essential part of Bible study. God revealed himself in time and place. Part of understanding this revelation is to engage the physical settings and historical/cultural contexts of that revelation.

Because our trips are study trips, along with world-renowned lecturers, we are also establishing opportunities and relationships with institutions and entities in Israel, such as the Israel Museum and Shrine of the Book. These are not usually offered to individual churches and schools. This enables us to leverage these relationships to provide unique opportunities for participants on our trips.

Where can I find more information on the trips, resource center, and summer institute?

For more information on our trips, resource center, and summer institute, visit our website, www.holylandsstudies.ag.org, call 417-862-2781 ext. 3590, or e-mail us at holylandsstudies@ag.org. I encourage people to read our blog, www.theshardandthescroll.com, and follow us on Facebook. ■

MARC TURNAGE, director, Center for Holy Lands Studies for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

Peter denied Him); the Coenaculum (traditional site of the Upper Room and Last Supper); and King David's Tomb.

The tour continues as we visit or view several of the historical and religious sites in both the Old City of Jerusalem and the City of David. The Old City includes stops at the pool of Bethesda where Jesus performed a healing miracle, a walk along the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Western Wall and Western Wall Tunnel excavations, and the Temple Mount.

While in the Old City, the most meaningful thing many Christian pilgrims do is walk the Via Dolorosa, the route Jesus took between His condemnation by Pilate and His crucifixion and burial. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the holiest of Christian sites, stands on the spot that includes Golgotha, or Calvary, where Jesus was crucified; the Stone of Unction (a polished red stone where the body of Jesus was anointed and prepared for burial); and the tomb (sepulchre) where He was buried. No visit to the Old City is complete without stopping at these important Christian sites.

The tour concludes with a visit to the City of David (ancient Jerusalem), which includes a walk through the conduit through which Hezekiah channeled water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam. The City of David is located outside the walls of today's Old City, south of the Temple Mount.

A drive along the Haas Promenade gives us a final panoramic view of Jerusalem.

Day 7, Modern Jerusalem and the Garden Tomb

The final day of our journey includes stops at Yad Vashem, the National Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust, the Israel Museum and the Shrine of the Book (exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls), the Knesset (Israel's Parliament building), and the Garden Tomb (the place believed by some Protestant groups to be the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea and possible site of the burial and resurrection of Jesus). The Garden Tomb provides the group with a quiet place for worship, reflection, and sharing in Holy Communion.

Paul Manor, director of North American operations for the Israel Ministry of Tourism, hosts a farewell dinner at the Hazer restaurant before our departure for Ben Gurion International Airport.

What Are You Waiting For?

The urge to visit the Holy Land is almost a universal yearning. The long-cherished desire of mine to visit the Lands of the Bible is no longer a dream. The memory of my trip is as vivid today as the day I stepped off the plane in Tel Aviv. I long to visit the Lands of the Bible again and again. My wish, too, is for my sons and wife to have the same opportunity.

If you have never been to Israel, my hope is that your dream will become a reality sooner rather than later. The Center for Holy Land Studies can help make your trip to Israel a reality. Truly, once you have been to Israel you will never be the same. ■

RICK KNOTH, managing editor, *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri

THEME:
TEACH US TO PRAY

Introduction:
**THIS is a
FOOTBALL**

BY GEORGE PAUL WOOD

At the start of one year's pre-season training, Vince Lombardi walked to the front of the room, stared down his Green Bay Packers, and said: "Gentlemen, this is a football." The Packers were professional athletes. They knew what a football was. What they wanted to know was the coach's new defensive formations and offensive plays. What they wanted to see was his strategy for a winning season. But Lombardi knew they needed to review the fundamentals, so he showed them a football. The game is all about who has it and what they do with it.

Like the Packers, North American ministers want new formations, new plays, and new strategies. We read books, attend conferences, and follow experts online in hope that these resources will move our churches from decline or plateau to growth and vitality. Some of these resources help us gain spiritual yardage, but we're still third and long. And when it comes to faith, punting is not an option.

In Mark 9, Jesus descends from the Mount of Transfiguration with three of His apostles to find the other nine failing in their attempts to exorcize a boy with a demonic spirit. After Jesus exorcizes the boy, the disciples ask Him why they couldn't do the same. Jesus replies, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (verse 29).

No amount of books, conferences, or online experts will prepare us to engage the spiritual challenges of North American culture if we have not immersed ourselves in prayer. If prayerlessness failed the nine, it won't succeed for us. So, in this issue of *Enrichment*, we turn to the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13, Luke 11:2–4) for guidance. We cannot reverse the decline, arrest the plateau, and catalyze the growth of our

churches unless God's presence, purpose, and provision are the center of our efforts. God must build His church His way if we are to prevail against hell's gates.

**If prayerlessness
failed the nine, it
won't succeed
for us.**

The Lord's Prayer? We groan. We roll our eyes. We are professional ministers. We recite that prayer from memory in King James English. We alternate between saying "debts" and "trespasses." We sing it in both melody and harmony. We see its brown and white colors, we smell its pigskin odor, we

feel its rough stitches and seams. We're past the fundamentals. We want something new.

But Jesus strides to the front of the room, looks searchingly into our eyes, and says: "Brothers and sisters, this is a Prayer." ☪



GEORGE PAUL WOOD, director of Ministry Resourcing and executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri.





TEACH US
TO PRAY

A Better Way to Pray—
PRAYING
LIKE JESUS

BY GEORGE O. WOOD

If only prayer
could deliver a demoniac,
how much more
is prayer required
when we pray for the world,
the nation, the Church, and
the tremendous needs faced
within our communities
and congregations?

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

People sometimes ask me, "Why should I pray? The Lord knows everything that is going to happen anyway, so do my prayers make a difference?"

The fundamental answer to that question is: "Jesus told us to pray." He never asks us to do something He himself did not do.

Each of the four Gospel writers shows moments when Jesus prayed: Matthew records nine such incidents; Mark, eight; Luke, 13; and John, five. From these 35 references, there are 23 separate occasions in Jesus' 3-year ministry when the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain on His prayer life. Let us look at them.

KEY MOMENTS

At His baptism. Luke notes: "As he was praying, heaven was opened" (3:21). During this moment of prayer, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice spoke from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." While the sky may not split wide while we pray nor the Spirit descend bodily, nevertheless heaven does open when we pray, the Spirit does come on us, and in prayer the Father assures us of His love.

Prior to selecting the Twelve. Jesus spent the night in the hills praying to God before He selected the disciples the next morning (Luke 6:12–16). A fascinating cross-reference is found in Matthew's account. Prior to selecting the apostles, Jesus told them to "ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38). After this prayer, Matthew records Jesus selecting the Twelve

(Matthew 10:1). I have often wondered if there is not a connection between 9:38 and 10:1. We know that Jesus had more than 12 followers: 72 (Luke 10:1), 120 (Acts 1:15), and 500 (1 Corinthians 15:6). How then did these 12 make the "cut"? I suspect they were the ones who took Jesus' request to pray seriously. While He was praying all night, they spent time praying as well. No one ever works effectively in the harvest of people unless he has prayed first for the harvest.

After His rejection at Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matthew 11:20–26). Jesus did mighty miracles in these three towns. Peter, Andrew, and Philip came from Bethsaida; James, John, and Matthew (Levi) came from Capernaum. Despite His mighty works in these towns, despite that half of the Twelve came from these towns — they rejected Him. This had to sting.

How do we respond when people reject us, when hard circumstances come our way? We must do what Jesus did — repair to prayer. In conversation with the Lord, our lives are refocused. We learn that His approval is more important.

At the hinge moment of recognition. The disciples had followed Jesus for 2 years, and the time had come for them to perceive His identity. Would they lay aside their preconceived idea of a political Messiah and accept Jesus' revelation of himself? The answer comes at Caesarea Philippi. It is while Jesus prays in private and His disciples are with Him that He begins to question them: "Who do the crowds say that I am? ... Who do you say I am?" (Luke 9:18–20).

If we desire others to come to Jesus, let us follow Jesus' pattern. That individual we are witnessing to has come to the major crossroads of life, the hinge moment that determines his earthly and eternal destiny. We must precede this moment by earnest prayer on our part.

At the high moment of revelation. Eight days after the disciples confessed Him as Christ, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a high mountain to pray. During His time of prayer He experienced metamorphosis: His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning (Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:28,29). It was the only time in His ministry where His divine nature shined through His human skin.

Prayer for us can also involve times of intense exhilaration in the presence of the Lord. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is certainly such a moment when our ineffable joy is expressed in words we do not know.

At times of deep need in others. The death of their brother, Lazarus, overwhelmed Mary and Martha. Jesus had only deepened their anguish by His delay in coming. They took Jesus to the grave and He was deeply moved. He ordered the stone removed and then prayed (John 11:41,42).

We too face deep moments of sorrow with others. We stand at the bedsides of dying parishioners and friends, or at the gravesides of committal. We always pray in such a time — and regardless of the circumstances we say with Jesus, "I knew

that You always hear me.' " The result from our prayer may be different from that with Lazarus, and that is a mystery for us. But we know He "always lives to intercede for them [us]" (Hebrews 7:25).

At the Last Supper. On the fateful evening Jesus was betrayed, He shared a last meal with those closest to Him. Despite knowing what lay before Him, He nevertheless gave thanks when He took the cup (Matthew 26:26,27).

What a lesson for us when we face adversity — as storm clouds gather in our lives, we can face them first with thanksgiving before we drink our own cup of sorrow. It is during the Passover meal that Jesus gave His high-priestly prayer (John 17). He prayed for himself (verses 1–5), for His disciples (verses 6–19), and for us (verses 20–26). The Twelve never forgot that prayer, and the people closest to us also will not forget the prayers we pray when we face hardship, suffering, and even death.

In Gethsemane. Where olives were crushed (the literal meaning of Gethsemane), Jesus himself came under great stress. Luke tells us the anguish was so great His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:41–44). There He prayed three times, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:36–44). He, who just days earlier raised Lazarus, now declines to extri-

cate himself from a horrendous death. He could easily have risen from prayer, taken the quick walk eastward up the Mount of Olives, and disappeared into the Judean desert. But He stayed ... for us.

There are times when we are not free to pursue our own comfort and leisure — moments when we must stick by our post of duty. What stabilizes us and gives us fortitude to remain is our life in prayer.

On the cross. The Gospels, all together, record Jesus speaking seven times from the cross. The first, fourth, and last times are prayers.

He began by praying, " 'Father, forgive ...' " (Luke 23:34). He does not close His fist and shout, "I'll get even with you for this. I'll send you to hell for this." No. He opens His hand, receives the nail, and opens His heart to intercede for the very people putting Him to death. He models for us that we too must forgive our enemies.

His second prayer, the fourth "word" from the cross is, " 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " (Mark 15:34). We often call this the cry of dereliction. Remember, however, that Jesus' limited amount of breathing constricted His ability to vocalize from the cross. His words are the first words from Psalm 22 — a psalm that ends in triumph. As His death approached, Jesus lets us know He is praying Scripture. Yes, at the moment, it appears God has abandoned Him, but not for long: "He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. ... all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (Psalm 22:24,27). We must never give in to the idea that God has abandoned us. There are moments when we feel utter darkness about us, but our end is sure. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

The final word from the cross is His prayer, " 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' " (Luke 23:46). This is the first prayer every Jewish child learns, much like we teach our children: "Now I lay me down to sleep. ..." The words are found in Psalm 31:5 — except Jesus added one word to the prayer that makes all the difference — "Father." In life and in death, we can trust the Father and commit all that we are to Him.

OTHER OCCASIONS

Jesus not only prayed at the key moments of His ministry, there were other times when He prayed. He prayed while it was still dark (Mark 1:35), after an exhausting schedule culminating in the feeding of the 5,000, into the evening (Matthew 14:23), and continuing all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). His frequent withdrawals to prayer tell us that He desired uninterrupted moments with the Father.

He took children in His arms and prayed for them (Matthew 19:13), prayed that the disciples receive the Spirit (John 14:16), and for the faith of His lead disciple to not fail (Luke 22:31,32).

The New Testament records three times when tears fall on



God has chosen to do His
work *through* our prayer,
not *without* it.

Jesus' cheeks. The first such occasion is at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). After 3 years of ministry, Jesus had not grown calloused or clinical about human suffering. Jesus is moved with compassion by our need.

The second time we see Him praying with tears is when "he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

Finally, the writer of Hebrews says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death" (5:7). He wept fervently for one person, for one city, and for His own submission to the Father's will.

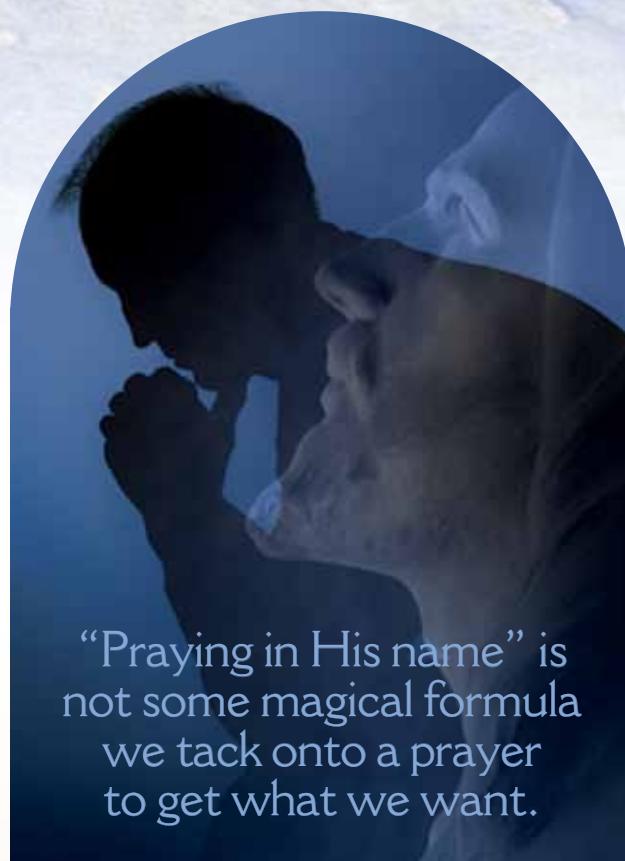
JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING PRAYER

Jesus also instructed His followers in what to pray for. He told us to pray for workers in the harvest (Matthew 9:38). The problem always lies not with the shortage of people willing to come to Christ, but the shortage of workers to bring them to Him. We must address this shortage through prayer.

He told us to pray in unity with others (Matthew 18:19,20). He told us to pray in His name (John 14:13,14; 15:7; 16:23-26). Praying in His name conditions our prayer.

"Praying in His name" is not some magical formula we tack onto a prayer to get what we want. Those who pray in His name know the character of the One in whose name they pray; and, therefore, we make our requests known and leave the response to Him for either divine intervention or divine strength.

He told us to pray with faith (Mark 11:22-26), and that some



"Praying in His name" is not some magical formula we tack onto a prayer to get what we want.

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things cannot be done except through prayer (Mark 9:29). God has chosen to do His work *through* our prayer, not *without* it.

Since the Lord is Sovereign, He may do anything He wants consistent with His nature. However, some things He will not do unless we pray. Remember how Jesus privately instructed the disciples: "This kind comes out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29)? If only prayer could deliver a demoniac, how much more is prayer required when we pray for the world, the nation, the Church, and the tremendous needs faced within our communities and congregations?

AN EXAMPLE OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

On February 9, 1958, a young Assemblies of God pastor in a rural town in Pennsylvania was watching the late show on TV while his wife and small children were asleep. On that night he evaluated his life. *How much time am I spending in front of the TV each night?* he asked himself. *A couple of hours at least. What if I sold the TV and spent that time praying?* The next morning he and his wife agreed to sell their TV if, after putting the ad in the paper, it sold within ½ hour after the paper hit the streets.

At the 29th minute the phone rang. "How much?"

The young pastor had not even thought of the price — but he instantly said, "\$100."

The caller said, "I'll take it. I'll be there in 15 minutes."

On February 25, a late Tuesday evening near the end of his prayer time — just 2 weeks and 2 days after the decision to sell the TV — this young pastor was in his study praying and began to feel a great heaviness. He felt an urge to pick up *Life*

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"Sorry, but the building committee doesn't agree that gargoyles are making a comeback."

magazine, but resisted at first because he didn't want to fall into a trap of reading a magazine on his prayer time. He had been fidgeting that evening — his wife and children had been away visiting grandparents in Pittsburgh. The magazine beckoned to him from his desk. Finally, he said, "Lord, is there something You want me to see?" He sat down in his brown swivel chair and opened the magazine.

He leafed along and came to a page that at first seemed to have nothing to interest him. It carried a pen drawing of a trial taking place 350 miles away in New York City — a place he had never been. The eyes of one of the seven figures in the drawing, on trial for murder, caught his attention. The look in the boy's eyes was one of bewilderment, hatred, and despair. The young pastor began to cry. He said aloud to himself, "What's the matter with me?"

He looked at the picture more carefully. The boys were all teenagers. They were members of a gang called the Dragons. They had brutally attacked and killed a 15-year-old polio victim named Michael Farmer. The seven boys had stabbed Michael

in the back seven times with their knives, and then beat him over the head with garrison belts. They went away wiping blood through their hair, saying, "We messed him good."

The story revolted the young pastor. It turned his stomach. And, then a thought came — *Go to New York City and help those boys*. On Friday morning the young pastor was in the courtroom — and the rest of the story is history. Had David Wilkerson not given himself to prayer, Teen Challenge would never have happened.

Since that time the ministry of Teen Challenge has transformed hundreds of thousands of lives. Around the world today and every day, 24,000 men and women are currently in a center being sent free by the power of Christ.

There's a needlepoint in David Wilkerson's office from his daughter, Bonnie: "My dad is famous not for who he is, but because he dared to listen when God wanted to hold conversation."

May we also listen when God wants to hold conversation. The Early Church father, John Chrysostom, expressed it eloquently

and succinctly: "God can refuse nothing to a praying church."

CONCLUSION

Harold Lindsell expressed it well: "God cannot do some things unless we work. He stores the hills with marble, but He has never built a cathedral. He fills the mountains with iron ore, but He never makes a needle or a jet airplane. He leaves that to us. If then, God has left many things dependent on man's thinking and working, why should He not leave some things dependent upon man's praying? He has done so. 'Ask and you shall receive.' And there are some things God will not give us unless we ask. We cannot suppose that God will do for us *without* prayer what He has promised to do for us only *through* prayer."

Thus, prayer is essential for spreading the gospel.

Jesus taught, " 'Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' " (Matthew 9:38). Jesus modeled what He asked of others. He himself spent the entire night in prayer before He called the 12 and named them apostles (Luke 6:12–16). And, would we ever have had the opening to

the Gentiles had Peter not gone up on the roof to pray — a prayer that resulted in Peter's willingness to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:9)? Would the first missionary journey have ever been launched had the Antioch leadership not been fasting and praying (Acts 13:1–3)? The apostle Paul urged the Colossians, "Pray for us that God may open a door for our message. ... Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (Colossians 4:3,4). Clearly the Early Church understood that a prayerless church is a powerless church. They learned well from Jesus: "Apart from me you can do *nothing*" (John 15:5, emphasis mine). 🌱



GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P., general superintendent of
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Missouri



TEACH US
TO PRAY



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THE POWER OF A PRAYING CHURCH

INTERVIEW

***P** rayer is a vital part of any church. While pastors and staff may talk about the importance of prayer, and do pray, they may not be putting the emphasis on prayer that will provide a breakthrough in their church and ministry.*



Scott Wilson, senior pastor at The Oaks Fellowship, Dallas, Texas, has discovered the value of prayer in opening doors of ministry and strengthening the church in its spiritual growth. George Paul Wood, director, Ministerial Resourcing, and executive editor of Enrichment journal, visited with Wilson and his key leaders concerning the importance of corporate prayer.

Andrea Lathrop has been attending The Oaks for 8 years. She has been on staff as community relations and world missions pastor for just under 2 years.

Bill Miller is technical director at Red Oak High School and has attended The Oaks for 27 years. He is currently on the board of elders.

Jack Mourning, chief operating officer, has been at The Oaks for over 30 years and on staff for a year and a half.

Scott Wilson has been on staff at The Oaks for 21 years: youth pastor for 11 years, associate pastor for 2 years, and 8 years as senior pastor.

Charles Spurgeon said the condition of the church can be accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. At The Oaks, how important is corporate prayer?

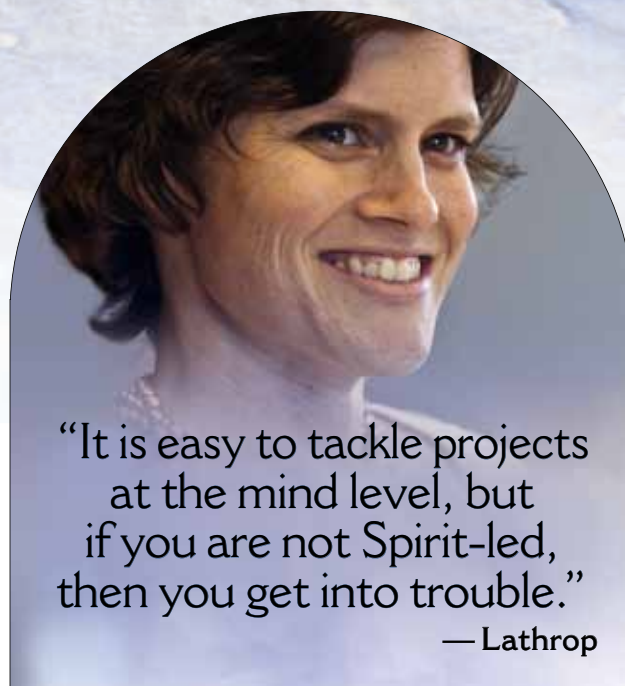
LATHROP: The prayer meeting is important with the people in the church. This has been especially so in the last couple of months. When we come together corporately to pray, it's powerful. A profound sense of the grace of God rests on our prayer meetings. The impact is evident in our Sunday services.

MOURNING: We have a very healthy program of prayer. Pastor Scott helps people realize that prayer is talking to God about the issues with which they are dealing. As a result, we are witnessing God's healing power in unprecedented ways. People are being healed of cancer and other serious diseases. Doctors who initially diagnose individuals with serious physical issues are afterward saying, "I can't tell you what's happened here, but the conditions are no longer apparent."

I think of Psalm 133 about the unity God looks for when His people come together. When He finds it, He blesses.

MILLER: The Spirit is moving in power as a result of our prayer meetings. About half of our Sunday School hour is spent in prayer. When my sister was diagnosed with cancer, she wanted the Sunday School class to pray for her healing. Today she is 100 percent cancer free. We have had many answers to prayer like this.

WILSON: If we are honest, we would agree we wished for higher attendance at the prayer meeting. In spite of an average Sunday morning attendance of over 3,000, we only have about 300 people attending the prayer meeting. Over a thousand other people are at the church during prayer meeting, but they are involved in other ministries.



"It is easy to tackle projects at the mind level, but if you are not Spirit-led, then you get into trouble."

— Lathrop

How do you communicate the value of the prayer meeting?

WILSON: The most powerful, influential tool I have is my Sunday morning sermon. In almost every message I promote our prayer meeting. For example, I might say, "Last Wednesday night while I was praying, this is what God said to me." I didn't say, "Come to the Wednesday prayer meeting." I said, "Last Wednesday night God was speaking." So during the next Wednesday prayer meeting I did an 8-minute teaching on how to hear and recognize the voice of God. One of the great values of our prayer meeting is people receive something that will help their prayer life.

I sometimes announce ahead of time the theme of my message. I might say, "This week, I'm talking about the power of the blood of Jesus Christ and what it means for your life. Some of you are living beneath your potential in Christ. If you want the fullness of Christ in your life, come Wednesday night and you will get the breakthrough for which you are looking."

I also talk about personal experiences and how God touches people. This past week a guy was baptized in water. During his testimony he said, "My first time to attend the church was during a Wednesday night prayer meeting. I walked into the prayer meeting and said, 'God, if You are talking to me, let the pastor come talk to me. I want to be set free from drugs, alcohol, smoking, and get my family right.' " He is the only guy I went to that evening. The Lord told me to go talk to him.

LATHROP: People are attracted to the prayer meeting because powerful things happen when we pray together. Pastor Scott does a great job saying you need more than just this right here. He is able to get people to show up who are really hungry for more of God in their lives.

WILSON: Pastors need to understand that when communicating the value of corporate prayer, it involves more than just

saying, “We had a great prayer meeting Wednesday night.” That’s flat. That’s not vision casting.

I’m always looking for a thematic outline for each prayer meeting. For instance, in January our focus was on 2 Chronicles 7:14. I said, “This is the first month of not only a year, but of a decade. We are going to give the firstfruits of our lives by praying one week for each of the following areas: faith, family, finance, and the future. We are going to lay it down before God.” We had over 500 people each of those weeks come to the prayer meeting.

What are the components of your Wednesday night prayer meeting?

WILSON: Each week I give the staff the service schedule, even though it might change on any given Wednesday night. We always start with a time of worship, where we come into the presence of the Lord. The worship will be very expressive at times.

Following worship, we have three different, 15- to 20-minute times of prayer encouragement. These are not the same each week. In a recent meeting, I gave a word of encouragement followed by a response time where I encouraged people to find a place to pray. I said to them, “Get on your face and admit to God ‘I need You.’”

The second period of encouragement centered on Communion. I said to the parents, “How awesome is it to sit at the table when your kids are happy with each other, talking and laughing and not fighting? How good is it for the Father to look down and see us loving each other and loving Him?” After we broke into groups, I said, “I want you to tell each other what you need. I want somebody in your group to pray over that need.”

Following Communion, we moved into the third prayer encouragement time. I said, “Some of you need a real breakthrough. I have asked the elders and staff to come up front. For the next 15 minutes if you need God to set you free or heal you, whatever you need from God, come here and start seeking Him.”

Other prayer encouragement times consist of group prayer for a variety of issues. One group will pray for our president and governmental officials on national, state, and local levels. Another group will pray about the church’s community care strategy of ministering to widows and single moms. Another group will pray about sex trafficking in the state. Another group will pray for an upcoming missions trip, and so forth.

In an attractional church model, how do you incorporate aspects of corporate prayer that appeal to visitors?

WILSON: I have four ways. First, I always pray at the end of worship. Second, I always give an altar call for people to come to Christ. Third, nearly 80 percent of the time I call for a response to the message. I might say, “This is what we talked about today, and it’s appropriate that you have a time to respond to the message. We can’t leave today without you responding to what you have heard.” Sometimes I will ask the congregation to write something

down. Other times I will ask them to stand and pray. Occasionally, I will have them turn to the person next to them and pray one for another. Finally, the fourth way we incorporate prayer into our services is by having our prayer team come up front and giving people opportunity to be prayed over.

On Mother’s Day I stopped and prayed four times during my message. I said, “If you feel you need God to bring provision to your life like a mom takes care of her kids, I want you to stand where you are right now.” Then I asked the entire church body to stand. After they stood I said, “Everyone who is a believing, Spirit-filled person, your faith is this. I want you to simply — don’t be weird, don’t freak anyone out — put your hand on their shoulder and let them know you are standing and praying with them.” I’m teaching our people to pray by modeling prayer.

Do you train your prayer team or do you select them because you know they know how to pray for people?

MILLER: We have had prayer team training in the past, but it is not something we do regularly. Most members of the prayer team are staff or elders; they are people who have prayer lives.

WILSON: We recently met to talk about expanding the training for the prayer team and what needs to take place in the elder and prayer ministry.

What does corporate prayer look like on the leadership or board level?

MILLER: The board meeting officially starts at 6:30 p.m. and can



“When we come up against an issue in staff meeting, we always bring it before the Lord.”

— Mourning

sometimes go until midnight. Pastor Scott teaches, and then we have an extended time of prayer. The teaching and prayer times must have priority before the other business of the board meeting.

Because prayer unifies, there is no animosity between board members. God has chosen to use this church because of the many ministry opportunities that have come our way. The blessing of God on this church comes from previous generations. We want to keep the blessing of God flowing to the next generation.

Every meeting Pastor Scott goes around to each person, looks him straight in the eye, and asks, "Is everything okay?" Occasionally, there's a point that needs to be clarified.

WILSON: And how do we clarify? We talk, we give information, but ultimately what we are seeking is unity. One time I said to Bill, "Are we good?" And he said, "We have some things to talk about." Bill and I met for breakfast so he could share what was on his heart.

The key to unity in leadership is praying together and committing us to stay clean before God and each other. If we are not in unity, we are not going to pray, we are not going to hear from God, and most important, we are not going to have His blessing.

Tell me about corporate prayer during staff meetings.

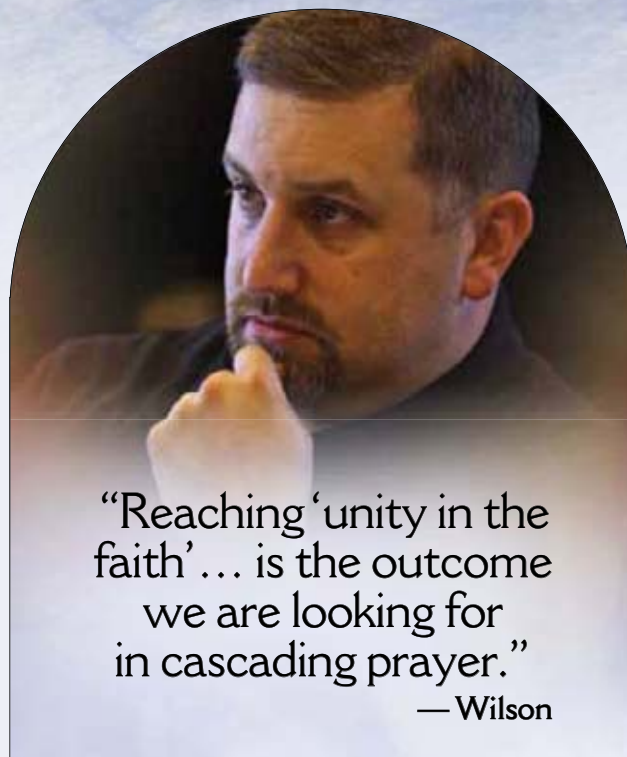
MOURNING: Prayer during staff meetings is much the same as in the board meeting. One of the five values in our mission statement is that we are Spirit-led. So when we come up against an issue in staff meeting, we always bring it before the Lord. This prayer focus is the result of Pastor Scott's leadership. He leads us in prayer.

Recently the church needed to make a major decision. Pastor Scott said, "This is such a big thing that I don't want to make that move until every member of this staff can say, 'I have heard from God.'" That really challenges you to pray. And everyone heard from God. It was strengthening to everyone. We are encouraged to seek God and let Him direct our path.

Discuss a time you were frustrated with the pastor's leadership and the role prayer had in the resolution.

MOURNING: Moving to home groups for the first time was a big change for me. It was a major shift in my thinking about how you do church. I told Pastor Scott, "You know, I'm going to jump on board with this, but I must tell you, I'm struggling and trying to figure my way through it." But through prayer, time in the Word, and conversation with people, my heart and mind were opened. The real power is in the small-group process. That is where real ministry happens.

God opened my heart and spirit to understand that He was going to do a new thing. So I told Pastor Scott, "God has helped me get past that issue, and I really feel like this is God. I really am



behind it now. It's not because I like it, it's because He likes it."

How can a pastor create a culture of prayer in the congregation that flows into the lives of leadership and individuals?

WILSON: First, you cannot call people to do something you do not do yourself. So modeling personal prayer is huge. Second, you need to create the value of prayer so you and your people believe John 15:5 is true: "Apart from me, you can do nothing." Third, preach it; live it; talk it. Fourth, not only do you exercise prayer on Sunday and Wednesday nights and in small groups, but you also create Bible studies for the week that go along with what you are teaching. Finally, invite ministry leaders from the church to join with core leadership when important decisions need prayer.

LATHROP: Anyone who leads a ministry, such as a missions trip, cannot lead unless he or she is a person of prayer. We expect this for ministry leaders. We make it clear in some of our missions manuals. One of the requirements of leadership is that the leader must open every meeting with prayer and have extended times of prayer before doing ministry outside the church.

MILLER: When the church is at a crossroads, prayer draws people together, and that strengthens and makes us more unified.

What is cascading prayer and what outcome do you expect from it?

WILSON: Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." You have to call your top people to prayer, hear from God, and spread it from group to group. You are a proponent of

cascading prayer when you communicate your vision for prayer with your board to get their input. You then communicate with various levels of leadership to get them on board. Finally, you communicate the vision for prayer to the entire congregation, so that prayer cascades down from leadership to every person in the pew.

The key to cascading prayer is not my getting up and saying, "We're going to build this building. We're going to raise \$10 million. We're going to do this and do that." No. What does God want us to do? So if I say, "I think I'm hearing God," I want the rest of the church to join with me to make sure I am hearing from Him. Ephesians 4:12 talks about reaching "unity in the faith." That is the outcome we are looking for in cascading prayer — unity.

Have you been involved in cascading prayer where you thought God was leading you in one direction, but the more prayer cascaded down through the organization, you started thinking, *Maybe we're missing it here?*

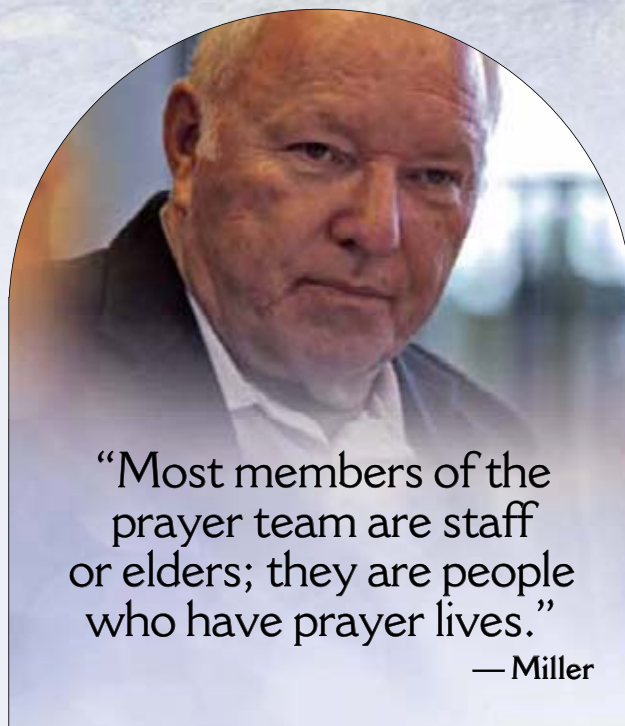
WILSON: In January 2000, we burned the mortgage on the Oak Cliff property. My dad said to the church, "This is the year of the Master's plan. We need to hear from God about the future. We are going to pray every Friday night at 7 until God speaks."

I never had in my mind that prayer was going to result in the church moving to a new location. I thought it was about, "God, what do You want us to do with the property we have?" I don't think anybody got it. I think if they had, they would have been against it at first.

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"I was trying to explain why she was the weaker vessel when she put me in a headlock and punched me out."



"Most members of the prayer team are staff or elders; they are people who have prayer lives."

— Miller

MILLER: That's right. Everybody was thinking about what is the master plan for Oak Cliff.

WILSON: Four months later I went to my dad's house after the Friday night prayer meeting. I was scared to tell him what I was feeling. It was like saying we need to move the temple from Jerusalem. How can you do that? Finally, I said, "Dad, what are you hearing in prayer?" He said, "What are you hearing, Son?" I said, "I'm hearing — it's weird, don't get mad — that we should keep the Oak Cliff location and go down to Red Oak and buy a piece of property and start another location there."


He said, "Son, do you know what this means?" I said, "No." He said, "Neither do I, but that is what I'm hearing as well."

Then we went to the board and said, "We've been praying. This is what we are hearing. What are you hearing?" Some of them said, "I'm hearing it." Some said, "I'd be open to hearing that."

So we started a prayer meeting every other Sunday at lunch. Finally, we told the board to pray for 2 weeks and come back and tell us what they were hearing. Once we had a peace about it in our hearts, even though we weren't sure, we thought it was big enough that we needed to share it with the entire congregation. That's when we went to the Friday night prayer meeting and started saying, "This is what we're hearing. Are you hearing this?" And it cascaded down from there.

What does Spirit-led strategic thinking look like at The Oaks Fellowship? How does corporate prayer shape this strategy?

MOURNING: When I think of Spirit-led strategic thinking, I am reminded of the time when Solomon was building the temple and God anointed certain individuals with special gifts. Gifting is wonderful, but without the anointing gifts are insufficient. With the anointing we know God is doing His thing and not man. I have learned that the business mind has to take a



backseat to the Spirit. The Spirit may energize the business mind, but it must happen in the Spirit's timing and under the Spirit's leadership.

LATHROP: A church gets into dangerous ground when it is not praying or the staff is not praying. Because most of the key decisions are made at the staff and board level, we must pray. It goes back to what Jack said. It is easy to tackle projects at the mind level, but if you are not Spirit-led, then you get into trouble.

I have found that I need to submit to the Lord and make sure my heart is in sync with where the church is going and that I'm hearing the same thing other leaders are hearing. You need to be careful with the strategy, planning, processes, and how you are going to play this all out. You cannot move too far away from prayer. You must lay it down before God.

How has the corporate prayer life of the church changed you personally?

WILSON: I am not surprised anymore at what God does, but every day I am amazed. Because we pray and seek God, everything seems to fall in place just at the right time. As we are obedient, God brings in the people and the finances. He is always on time. I have learned to trust Him more and more.

MOURNING: I have an architectural and project management background. Because of that, I served on the building committee. I had my traditional architectural ideas of what I thought the church should look like. Two architects provided us with drawings. I spotted one that I loved. It was a beautiful church with a nice steeple and gorgeous sanctuary. I was getting fired up. The Lord quickly reminded me of what He had whispered to me a couple of months earlier. He said, "You know, Son, I am bringing younger leadership into the church — younger than you — and I need you to be obedient, humble, and supportive." I said, "Well, sure, I'm going to do that."

A few months later in a planning meeting, Pastor Scott's vision of the church building began to emerge. It was not what I was thinking. Pastor Scott described a church with a mall area so the unchurched would not feel uncomfortable. He said the unchurched are resistant to a traditional church structure. I said, "You're kidding, a mall?" I was disappointed with that. Furthermore, he described the sanctuary as a black theater-style auditorium. I was struggling like crazy with his ideas.

I was frustrated as I drove home after the meeting. The Spirit of the Lord came in the car and said, "You seem to be having a little problem with this, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah. This isn't going to look like a church at all." The Lord said, "Do you remember our conversation a couple of months ago about My doing a new thing under new and younger leadership and that I need you to be on board? I remember you saying yes."

I got real quiet and said, "Wow. Is this what You were talking

about?" I felt the Spirit of the Lord say, "Absolutely. Don't be fearful. Just trust and obey." It changed my heart and spirit forever.

LATHROP: I'm thankful for an organization that places an emphasis on corporate prayer. I keep thinking about how small my own personal prayer life has been at times. When I was at school, with two babies at home, working, and trying to get through the day, prayer wasn't a priority as it is now. Tuesday's staff prayer time has been a lifesaver for me.

MILLER: Prayer greatly changed my life a long time ago. I was barely a Christian, let alone a hot Christian. I was working in a gas station in Fresno, California, and I got held up. It was scary. I have never had someone stick a gun in my face. The next morning in church a little old lady came up to me and asked, "What were you doing about 10 o'clock last night? I was praying for you." I said, "Yes, you were."

That is when I knew God really cares for me. Since that experience, I believe 100 percent in prayer. Now when I pray, God answers. I serve Him to the best of my ability. That's all I can do. 🙏



TEACH US
TO PRAY

What would
happen if a wave
of leaders
acknowledged
their hunger
— their need
for a more
intimate
prayer life
— and invited
those they lead
into their
journeys?

FOLLOW ME AS I FOLLOW CHRIST ... IN PRAYER

BY ALICIA BRITT CHOLE

I confess: “Why” is one of my favorite words because “why” anchors the visible (and temporal) with the invisible (and eternal). On a ship, anchors beneath the water ensure that the vessel above the water does not drift too far from a point of reference or safety. In the life of a servant, the anchor of “why” likewise ensures that our visible plans and activities do not drift too far from their initial inspiration and ultimate purpose.

How easy it is in the fullness of leadership to cut anchor, to stop asking “why,” to disconnect the visible from the invisible, to allow success to distance us from source, to wake up and realize that our lives and words have inspired others to be busy ... without a clear (and, consequently, sustainable) cause.

So when asked to write on prayer from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:9 and, specifically, to address equipping ministers to lead others into a life of prayer, the first question I asked (not surprisingly) was “why?” Why do we want to encourage those we lead to pray?

Because Jesus taught His disciples to pray?

Because they should?

So their needs will be met?

To help them ... sin less? Give more? Mature more quickly?

Our answer will dictate our emphasis and our emphasis will affect their motivation.

Perhaps the question should move closer to home: Why do we, as leaders, pray? I can only answer that for myself. I pray because I breathe. Each breath shouts God’s existence. As a former atheist, the reality that God makes himself knowable is still unspeakably overwhelming. We are because He is. We live because He loves.

Prayer is to our spirits what breathing is to our bodies: an organic essential of true life.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Matthew places what would become one of the most recited prayers of all time in the midst of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount — a message that, line upon line, presses us to live a faith that is sincere to the core.

In the parallel passage in Luke, one of the disciples requested of Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The student asked a question in the plural and the teacher answered with a prayer entirely in the plural beginning with the possessive pronoun *our*. Why?

Perhaps because *our* coalesces individuals into groups and then transforms groups into families. *Our* is the first key that empowers us to lead others into a life of prayer. *Our* introduces a

collective calling, a common commitment, a cooperative act of faith. *Our* in the life of Jesus meant that others saw Him praying, caught Him praying, and prayed with Him at His invitation.

Two examples of *our* in decades past transformed me. As a new follower of Jesus, my first experiences with prayer in the plural took place in the home of Sister Helena Kach on the border of Mexico. Every Thursday night, the Kachs would invite the youth over to their house for “prayer meetin’.”

Sister Kach would hand out a dozen worn, coffee-stained song booklets, and with her accordion lead us in stirring worship. Simple chorus after simple chorus, our small circle would enter a holy place. Without cue, God’s tangible presence silenced us.

New to faith, I was unaware of the “eyes closed” rule, so I quite literally watched and prayed. Out of the silence, with a deep voice thick with tears, Sister Kach would raise her face heavenward and begin to pray, “O God. Our God ...” She was radiant. *Our* made me hungry.

Sister Kach invited me into *our* through her presence. Another saint invited me into *our* through his pen.

In Mindanao, Philippines, at the age of 45, missionary Frank Laubach encouraged others to join him in a prayer venture through openly journaling his experiment in practicing the presence of God. On January 26, 1930, Laubach wrote: “In defense of my opening my soul and laying it bare to the public gaze in this fashion, I may say that it seems to me that we really seldom do anybody much good excepting as we share the deepest experiences of our souls in this way. It is not the fashion to tell your inmost thoughts, but there are many wrong fashions, and concealment of the *best in us is wrong*.”¹

Countless times I have savored each of Laubach’s journal entries. The pages of this thin book are now creased and discolored and the binding is frail. Yet to this day, Laubach’s *our* still makes me hungry.

In the life of a leader, *our* issues a summons to journey transparently (as opposed to only privately) with those whom we lead. What might that journey look like in our day? What would happen if a wave of leaders rose to the Laubach legacy? What would happen if a wave of leaders acknowledged their hunger — their need for a more intimate prayer life — and invited those they lead into *our* through vulnerably journaling their journeys?

I can envision the under-140 character Twitter updates:

“Searching for a prayer mentor. Ache 2 know God more.”

“Starting prayer experiment with 5 minutes of silence to begin my day. Didn’t make it past 23 seconds.”

“Even when my body is still, my mind is in motion.

Long road ahead. Worth the workout.”

“Took first 24-hour prayer retreat WITHOUT also preparing a message. Wow. I mean, WOW. Posted journal entries on my blog.”

Do you think those we lead might be interested in such a journey? I do. I think *our* will make them hungry.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Compared to "Lord," "Father" occurs rather infrequently in the Old Testament as a name for God. However, the picture painted by these few references is breathtaking. As *Father*:

God is our Creator who made us and formed us (Deuteronomy 32:6).

God knows us and is our Redeemer (Isaiah 63:16).

God is the Potter and we are the clay, the work of His hands (Isaiah 64:8).

God is our "friend from [our] youth" (Jeremiah 3:4).

God has compassion upon us (Psalm 103:13).

God longs for us to turn from evil and honor Him as our Father (Jeremiah 3:19; Malachi 1:6).

The Messiah would bear the title "Everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6).

This image of God as *Father* was present in the minds of Jesus' Jewish listeners when He taught them to pray. Jesus' "Our Father" echoed phrases from the *Kaddish D'Rabanan* (Rabbi's Kaddish) and linked one of Jesus' first teachings in the New Testament to one of the last prophetic cries of the Old Testament: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" (Malachi 2:10). "Our Father," Jesus began, and the Teacher's words immediately centered His listener's commonly pursued journey of prayer in their commonly held relationship in life — we are all God's children.

Two Greek words are translated as *father* in the NIV. The first, *gennaō*, is the famous "begat" of the KJV and makes the vast majority of its appearances in Matthew's genealogical account of Jesus. The second, *pater*, occurs over 400 times in the New Testament and is used to speak of God as Father, physical or spiritual fathers, forefathers, patriarchs, and ancestors.

Jesus could have said, "Our Creator," or "Our Redeemer," or "Our Lord," or "Our Fortress," or "Our Shepherd." But as He considered how to lead His listeners into a life of prayer, Jesus chose to begin His teaching with an emphasis on the fatherhood of God. Why?

Perhaps God's greatness is easier to comprehend than God's nearness. Perhaps because — more than failed forms and misguided methods — our true challenge to advancing in prayer lies deep within our God concept. If we saw God as Jesus saw God — as Father — prayer would be as natural as thinking.

Personally, an atheist substantially enriched my God-concept. My earthly father, Louis Robert Britt, was born in 1940 in Jackson, Mississippi, and died in 2001 in McAllen, Texas, on my son's fourth birthday. I miss him more than words can say.

Like old friends, Dad and I would sit together into the wee hours. In those late night talks, I had



my first glimpse of the Divine. Not that Dad believed in a god or gods — not at all. But Dad let me know that no question was foolish, no subject was off limits. Nothing shocked him, shamed him, or shut him down — and that is truly godlike.²

When God interrupted my existence and, shortly after, a mentor referred to God as *Our Father*, I thought, *Ah, how wonderful*. As a near, safe, and attentive father, Dad gave me a jump-start into the development of a healthy God-concept. Others have not been so fortunate. Perhaps this too answers the "why" of Jesus' choice of words. Jesus sets an example for us as leaders to couple a vulnerable viewing of our prayer lives with a reconstructive teaching emphasis on the fatherhood of God.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

At first glance, I viewed this phrase as some sort of GPS address — *Father in heaven* — and wondered, *What a curious pairing of words*. Father is a person. Heaven is a place. Father is warm. Heaven is space. Father is among the closest of earthly relationships, yet this Father is *really* out of town.

As I studied though, I became intrigued with the phrase as a title. The Greek words translated "Father in heaven" appear in tandem slightly over a dozen times throughout Scripture with related wording — "heavenly Father" and "Father who is in heaven" — adding only six more occurrences. I could not find this close pairing of Father + heaven anywhere in the Old Testament. The phrase appears to be unique to the New Testament, unique to the Gospels, and, further, unique to the voice of Jesus. In the Bible, only Jesus refers to God as "Father in Heaven." Why?

I do not know, but the possibilities are fascinating. Perhaps the term was used by generations past, but somehow never made it onto the pages of the Old Testament. Perhaps the phrase arose in the gap between the Old and New Testaments and was familiar to Jesus' hearers. Perhaps the connection was unfamiliar and, therefore, provided an opportunity for the faithful to take a fresh look at their God.

Whatever the explanation, it seems valuable — as we consider Jesus' example of leading others into a life of prayer — to study



the contexts in which Jesus used this term. What might Jesus have been emphasizing by referring to God as “Father in Heaven”?

“Father in Heaven” and “heavenly Father” occur mostly in the context of instruction, often in connection with an if-then principle. (See sidebar, “Father in Heaven If-then Principles.”)

The composite of these teachings reveals an attentive, involved God. This is no fickle, yawning, Greek mythical construct that views humankind as a spectator sport for his own amusement. This is “Dad,” responsible for and responding to His children. This is “Father,” calling us to be like Him and disciplining us when we choose against Him. This is “Father in heaven,” parenting us with eternity in view.

Whereas “our” takes us from me to we, and “Father” startles us with God’s nearness, “Father in heaven” captures God’s interaction with us on earth. As Jesus was leading others deeper into prayer, He selected descriptors that portrayed God as a generous, all-seeing dad who responds with either blessing or discipline to every choice we make. In other words, “Dad” is in the house (and He is not napping).

Though personally I love napping, and though I am a faint shadow of God’s strength as a parent, my kids know that the consistent emphasis on choice and consequence in our home is for the salvation of their souls. “Do Daddy and Mommy say yes to help you or to hurt you?” I will ask one of my tearful children.

“Help me,” they sputter through their sobs.

To which I reply, “And do Daddy and Mommy say no to help you or to hurt you?”

“To help me,” they answer as they snuggle into my arms.

Perhaps Jesus chose “Father in heaven” because its combined

emphasis of nearness and oversight, tenderness and justice, is confidence inducing. Why?

Love makes discipline bearable. Discipline makes love believable.

In harmony, love and discipline empower parenting — on earth and from heaven — to take the path of the greatest good as opposed to the path of the least resistance.

“Our Father in heaven.”

(Let us pray.) ☺

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Why do I (really) want to lead others into a deeper life of prayer?
2. How can I personally embrace the Laubach legacy?
3. In what creative venues can I partner with the Holy Spirit’s reconstruction of God concepts through an emphasis on God as “Father” and “Father in heaven”?

NOTES

1. Frank Laubach and Brother Lawrence, *Practicing His Presence*, Gene Edwards, ed., (Auburn, Maine: Christian Books, 1973), 3.
2. Alicia Britt Chole, *Finding an Unseen God: Reflections of a Former Atheist*, (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany Publishers, 2009), 32.



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FATHER IN HEAVEN IF-THEN PRINCIPLES

If you let your light shine before men, then others will see and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

If we love our enemies, then we will be sons of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:44,45).

If we give to be seen, then we will have no reward from our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1).

If we forgive others, then Father in heaven will forgive us (Matthew 6:14; 18:35; Mark 11:25).

If we do the will of Jesus’ Father who is in heaven, then we will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

If we acknowledge Jesus before men, then Jesus will acknowledge us before His Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32).

If we disown Jesus before men, then Jesus will disown us before His Father in heaven (Matthew 10:33).

If we do Father in heaven’s will, then we are Jesus’ mother, brothers, and sisters (Matthew 12:50).

If two agree on earth in prayer, then Father in heaven will hear and act (Matthew 18:19).

Additional “Father in Heaven” attributes:

He is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

He feeds the birds of the air and knows what we need (Matthew 6:23,32).

He revealed Jesus as the Son of God to Peter (Matthew 16:17).

He knows how to give good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13).

He watches over little ones closely and does not want any of them lost (Matthew 18:10,14).

— ALICIA BRITT CHOLE



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CONVERSING WITH GOD

BY DOUG OSS

Practical ideas and principles to encourage and engage the church to pray in light of the biblical names for God.

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND SON *from Luke 11:2*

INTRODUCTION



One recorded prayer in all of Scripture stands out above all others. Jesus made this prayer the salient prayer of His earthly ministry when He laid out the model of prayer for believers of all times, places, and circumstances. In response to a request from His

disciples that He teach them to pray, Jesus responded by saying, “Whenever you pray, pray in this way” (Luke 11:2, author’s translation).¹ The ensuing prayer became the keystone prayer in Church history. Known from antiquity as the “Lord’s Prayer,” or the “Our Father,” Jesus’ prayer shows His disciples the way to become more closely connected to their Father through prayer (cf. Luke 11:1–4; Matthew 6:9–13).

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the prayer life of today’s church in light of the Lord’s Prayer, and specifically the phrase “Father, let your name be revered” (author’s translation, Luke 11:2: *Pater, agiastheto to onoma sou*). After discussing this phrase and its implications for prayer, I will present ideas for pastors to use to encourage their people to pray in light of the biblical names for God.

THE FATHER’S HOLY NAME AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

The opening of the prayer is striking because of the use of the intimate *Pater* without a qualifier (from the Aramaic *abba*, father).² Addressing God directly by using this form implies a close, personal relationship between child and father. So, the

opening emphasis of Jesus’ prayer is on the nature of the One to whom the disciples make their requests — a Father who is kind, caring, and responsive to the needs of His children.³

Addressing God in a manner that acknowledges His fatherly love does not preclude us from approaching Him with respect. In fact, this first declaration of the Lord’s Prayer asks that God’s name may be “reverenced” (*agiastheto*). As Marshall has stated rightly with regard to this expression, “God’s name is in effect His reputation among men, but it essentially stands for God himself: men are to speak of Him with appropriate reverence and honour.”⁴ The “name” of God is a reference to His person, His very nature. For example, when someone prays “in the name Jesus,” that person is not invoking some



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EL SHADDAI

el elyon
el olam
el roi
yahweh

el olam el roi yahweh el shaddai el sadday el elyon el olam el roi yahweh

EL SHADDAI

el shaddai
el sadday
el elyon
el olam
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EL OLAM

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EL SHADDAI

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el olam el roi yahweh el shaddai el sadday el elyon el olam el roi yahweh

sort of eastern-mystical incantation. (Just ask the sons of Sceva about that cf. Acts 19:13–16). Rather, the one who prays is invoking the personal authority and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. One calls into action the very person of our Lord, and prays with His full divine authority and power.

Bock has demonstrated the close conceptual and linguistic relationship the Lord's Prayer has with the *Kaddish* of ancient synagogue services. He describes it thus: "Letting the name be sanctified asks that God establish and show His uniqueness, since to refer to His name is to refer to His person. The *Kaddish*, an eschatological Jewish prayer that ended ancient synagogue services, is similar in force:

*'Exalted and hallowed be His great name
in the world which He created according to His will.
May He let His kingdom rule
in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime
of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon.'*

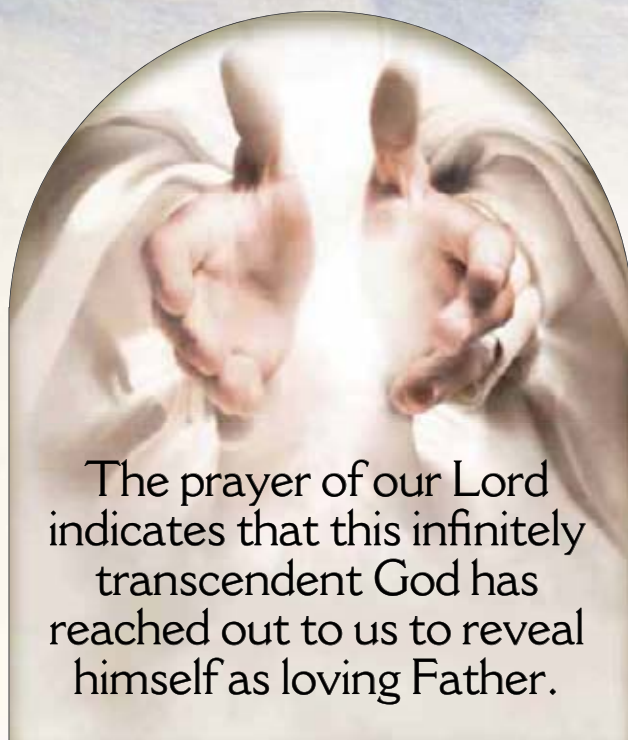
"The picture is of the creator God, enthroned and manifesting His rule. His glory is made evident to all. The disciple opens the prayer with recognition of the one being addressed, trusting and hoping that God in his greatness will manifest himself (note that the passive verb looks to God to act)."⁵

So Jesus taught His followers to pray in a manner similar to that of ancient Israel, but with one striking addition evident in the intimate address of the prayer to God as *Pater*. Respect for God does not preclude intimacy with Him. He is our Father and has our best interests at heart. He is indeed a transcendent and infinite being beyond our ability to comprehend fully. But He is not solely that. The prayer of our Lord is all the more remarkable because it indicates that this infinitely transcendent God has reached out to us to reveal himself as loving Father. In fact, as Jesus teaches even further on prayer in Luke 11:5–13, He draws an analogy between one's human father and one's Heavenly Father, suggesting that God as Father is even more responsive to our needs, and that He responds in ways that exceed the finite abilities of our human fathers (verses 11–13).

This same fatherhood of God is evident also in the Old Testament names for Him. Each divine name emphasizes an aspect of God's nature that, in the light of the manner in which our Lord taught us to pray, will inform us about prayer as intimate connection with our eternal Father. It is beyond the scope of this article to treat the names in an exhaustive manner, so the following names comprise a selected list. Let us consider the implications of these selected names for the place of prayer in the contemporary church.

PRAYER IN LIGHT OF THE NAMES OF GOD

As we observed in the case of *Pater*, we also find similar ideas in Old Testament names for God. The Old Testament usage of divine names also represents God's person, presence, and character.⁶ For purposes of the discussion below we will focus



The prayer of our Lord indicates that this infinitely transcendent God has reached out to us to reveal himself as loving Father.

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on the names that reflect specific aspects of God's nature, person, and character, and not the more general names of *El*, *Elohim*, or *Eloah*.⁷

***El Shaddai/el saddai*.** This name (or as some scholars prefer, title)⁸ occurs regularly in the Abraham narratives (Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25) and may well be the most common name of God in the patriarchal period.⁹ Its exact meaning is difficult to ascertain. It has been popularly understood in terms of "sufficiency." Other suggestions include linking it to the verb *sadad*, "to devastate or destroy." The LXX most often translated this title as *pantokrator*, the almighty or all-powerful. Whether it means "sufficient one" or "destroyer," the sense of Almighty God (all-sufficient or all-powerful to destroy) is readily at hand.

Prayer Focus: For purposes of prayer, this name would inspire the believer to pray in a way that entrusts even the most difficult circumstances into the hands of Almighty God, who has power over all creation to bring about His will, as He did when delivering the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt.

***El Elyon*.** This name means "God Most High." *Elyon* is a cognate of the Hebrew verb *alah*, "to go up, be exalted." Van Groningen describes the basic sense of this name well when he writes: "In all dimensions of life, in worship, military activities, political and economic involvement, God is to be acknowledged as the incomparable, the exalted, the maker, possessor, and ruler of all people, all things, and all events."¹⁰

Prayer Focus: Prayer focused on this divine name acknowledges the absolute lordship and rule of God over the believer, and indeed, all things. Nothing is out of God's control even when through human lenses it might seem as though life has gone awry. There are no coincidences; nothing is random; there is no such thing as luck. There is only divine sovereignty, providence, and human choice.

El Olam refers to God as the eternal One who creates time and stands above and outside of time as we know it. *Olam* carries the basic lexical sense of everlasting or immeasurable duration. The term is frequently attached to God's character and attributes as in the case of His faithfulness (Psalm 117:2).

Prayer Focus: In the Apocalypse, both the Father and Jesus are pictured as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:12–16). The emphasis of these passages is on God's final and absolute control over human history, eventuating in the final, once-for-all dissolution of evil and the final, eternal blessing of believers. Throughout Revelation, believers (including martyrs under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11) are encouraged to trust the eternal God, who will vindicate them and bring justice on the earth in His own time, according to His own plan. The point is for believers to be patient and endure, even when God's own timing is inscrutable. Have faith that God will intervene, even when His intervention is not yet in sight.

El Roi is used only once in the Bible when Hagar used the expression to describe how God had looked after her and provided for her in the desert (Genesis 16:13). Literally, the "God who sees," probably carries the connotation of the "God who watches over me" in the Hagar narrative. While this exact expression is not found elsewhere, we find similar expressions that describe God as all seeing and all knowing in the Psalms (i.e., Psalms 33:18; 139:1).

Prayer Focus: This name gives believers assurance and confidence that God is watching over them and caring for them. In Romans 8:28, Paul writes, "All things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose." All things work together for good because, first, God the Father is in

control of all things (8:29–32); second, the Holy Spirit intercedes for believers according to God's will for them (8:26,27); and third, Jesus also intercedes for believers (8:34; cf. also Hebrews 4:14–16). Nothing, therefore, has the power to separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35ff.). All three persons of the Trinity are watching over those who follow Christ.

Yahweh and its compound forms. *Yahweh* is a distinctly Hebrew and personal name for God. It occurs 6,823 times in the Old Testament, always as God's proper name. The meaning of the name is unclear, although traditionally scholars link it to the Hebrew verb *hayah*, "to be." Thus, there has been a traditional focus on God's autonomous self-existence when considering this name. However, since the meaning has not been clearly determined, some more recent translators have avoided the traditional rendering of "Lord," and reverted to transliteration, reserving the use of Lord for the Hebrew *Adonai*.¹¹

The uses of *Yahweh* in the Old Testament make it abundantly clear that this is the name above all names, and incorporates the senses of all other divine names into its overarching usage in Scripture.¹² In particular, the uses of this name emphasize the faithfulness of God to keep His covenant promises. Thus, it is also found in several prominent compound forms that emphasize the faithfulness of God in keeping His covenant with His people: *Yahweh-Yireh*, God will find or provide (Genesis 22:14); *Yahweh-Nissi*, God is my banner (the banner was used to rally the army to battle: Isaiah 11:10; 59:19); *Yahweh-Shalom*, God is peace (Judges 6:24); *Yahweh-Sabaoth*, God of hosts (both human and angelic armies: Numbers 10:14–28; Psalm 33:6); *Yahweh-Rapha*, God is the healer (Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3); *Yahweh-Rohi*, God is my shepherd (Psalm 23:1).

Prayer Focus: The covenants (and covenant promises) remain intact because of God's faithfulness, not because of the faithfulness of His people, who have indeed failed Him repeatedly. The New Testament affirms this in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). In fact, people are able to have faith in Christ only because of God's prior work in "drawing" them to believe (John 6:44; 12:32; 16:6–11). Salvation is based exclusively on God's grace and faithfulness to us (Ephesians 2:1–10). Followers of Christ can trust in His provision and the presence of the peace and joy of His kingdom through the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17; 16:20; Ephesians 2:14). As well, this name can inspire the church to rally behind the banner of Christ in evangelizing a human race that has gone astray into sin (Romans 10:14–17). God and the Lord Jesus are faithful to fight and work on behalf of those who are in Christ (Romans 16:20; Revelation, throughout). The Lord Jesus as our Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) will care for us in the most dire of circumstances. It is clear that this highest of names, the name above all names, is finally realized in Christ, and so prayer should occur with ultimate confidence in the faithfulness of Christ to keep "all the promises of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 4:14–16).



CONCLUSION

This article serves merely as a springboard for prayer in light of the names of God. As it hopefully has become apparent to the reader, there is virtually no end to inspiration for the church to pray in light of God's names. The single most important principle to keep in mind when praying in light of the names of God is that all the meanings of the names, and all their implications, find, finally, Kingdom-fulfillment in Jesus Christ. It is to Him, and *in His name*, that we live, act, speak, work, and pray (e.g., Book of Acts, throughout). "Our Father" has chosen to reveal himself in His only begotten Son, and has given to Him the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. The effectiveness of the prayer life of the church depends on the church's level of personal relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:10–12). 🌀

NOTES

1. John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Luke 9:21–18:34, vol. 35b (Dallas: Word, 1993), 610–12.
2. Darrell Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2. 9:51–24:53. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1051, 52.
3. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek*

Text, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1978), 456. See also Robert H. Stein, Vol. 24: Luke (electronic ed.) Logos Library System. *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 324.

4. Marshall, 457.
5. Bock, 1052.
6. C.J.H. Wright. "Names of God," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., G.W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 504. Gerard Van Groningen, "Names of God" in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 880–88.
7. For further reading on the uses of these three names see Wright, 505, 06; Van Groningen, 881, 82; also *Adonai* is not treated here; for further reading on *Adonai* see Wright, 507.
8. Wright, 507.
9. *Ibid.*, 506.
10. Van Groningen, 882.
11. *Ibid.*, 883.
12. Wright, 507; Van Groningen, 883, 84.



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UP THERE, DOWN HERE, AMONG US, IN ME

The Lord's Prayer aligns our desires for God, neighbor, and self. It also aligns the desires within us for wholeness and integrity.

BY GEORGE PAUL WOOD

If your prayers are like mine, they are often self-centered. Much of my praying is a to-do list for God. After a lifetime of praying among other Christians, I have concluded that their prayers are largely self-centered, too.

There is nothing wrong with asking God to supply our needs. After all, Jesus himself teaches us to pray, "give us," "forgive us," and "deliver us" (Matthew 6:11-13). Indeed, He promises that "all these things" — meaning life's necessities — "will be given to you" by God (6:33). It is not wrong to ask for what Jesus teaches us to ask for and promises to give us.

But something is wrong with our praying when we fail to order properly the self and its needs, however real and important they are. According to Jesus, the proper order of prayer is God first, then us: "*your name*," "*your kingdom*" and "*your will*" (6:9,10) first; then, "give us," "forgive us," and "deliver

us" (6:11–13). And the premise underlying Jesus' promise that God will meet our needs is the command to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (6:33).

Whether, then, from the standpoint of prayer's proper order or from our hopeful expectation, we must learn to pray the words, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10).

PRAYER IN RELATIONSHIP

To start, we must learn to pray without *ego*. In Greek, *ego* is the first person singular pronoun, meaning "I." *I* is absent from the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13), along with *me* and *my*. Instead, the first person plural pronouns *our* and *us* appear. So does the second person singular pronoun *you*, which refers both explicitly and implicitly to "Our Father" (6:9).

This point is spiritual, not grammatical. *I* (the pronoun) is absent from the Lord's Prayer, but *I* (the person) am not. *I* myself must seek the Kingdom. *I* myself must pray for its coming and the doing of God's will. *I* cannot pray by proxy. Neither can you.

But how do I conceive of myself when I pray? Am I an individual in isolation? The neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus spoke of life as "the flight of the alone to the Alone." Many Christians conceive of themselves in prayer in a similarly individualistic way. "I come to the garden alone," runs the lyric of a much-loved hymn, for example.

Jesus' use of pronouns in the Lord's Prayer reaches a different conclusion. *I* am not an individual in isolation. *I* am an individual in relationship. *I* do not pray, "My Father." Neither do you. We pray, "Our Father." So, in prayer, we are doubly related: horizontally to one another and vertically to God. Through the Spirit of His Son, God makes it possible for us to call Him, "Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). In prayer, we are not alone because we are not our own. We belong to God and through Him to one another.

Furthermore, the God to whom we pray is not alone. He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6). Together, they pour the Holy Spirit upon believers as they pray (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33).

Prayer, then, is not a flight of the alone to the Alone. It is a pilgrimage of Christians in community to the Holy Trinity.

Two practical actions result from how Christians conceive of themselves in prayer. First, *I* must pray *with* others. It is, of course, important to pray in solitude, as Jesus taught (Matthew 6:6) and modeled (Matthew 4:2). But corporate prayer must always complement solitary prayer. Throughout Acts, the Holy Spirit is powerfully present whenever believers gather to pray together (2:1–4; 8:14–17; 10:44–46; 13:1–3; 19:1–7).

Second, *I* must pray *for* others. Praying ego-centered prayers — as if only "me and mine" matter

— repudiates the gospel. The two greatest commandments are "love the Lord your God" and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–40). Obviously, *I* cannot love myself without praying for the needs of me and mine. But as an individual in relationship, *I* also pray for God's priorities and the interests of my neighbor.

PRAYER AND DESIRE

Prayer is an expression of desire. We desire food, so we ask God to feed us. We desire reconciliation, so we ask God to forgive us. We desire guidance, so we ask God to lead and deliver us.

The important question is whether we align our desires. As revealed by the order of the Lord's Prayer, we should first desire the hallowing of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, and the doing of His will (Matthew 6:9,10). These vertical desires are aligned: God's name is hallowed when His kingdom comes, and His kingdom comes when His will is done. Then, we should desire what we and our neighbors need: food, forgiveness, guidance (6:11–13). These horizontal desires are aligned with the vertical ones: God's will is done when we receive our daily bread, forgive as we have been forgiven, and experience deliverance from evil (6:11–15). Notice the holism of these desires. They are physical, social, and spiritual.

The Lord's Prayer, then, aligns our desires for God, neighbor, and self. It also aligns the desires within us for wholeness and integrity.

When we pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking God to fulfill our aligned and holistic desires. We are asking God to close the gap between heaven and earth until there is nothing but "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Or, as John Ortberg puts it, we are asking God, "Make up there down here."

At the outset of His ministry, Jesus announced the imminent fulfillment of all our desires. "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). For Him, the coming of the kingdom of God is good news — the gospel.

The connection between Kingdom and gospel first appears in Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

Both Isaiah and Jesus understand God's peace, salvation, and reign broadly. Isaiah 11:1–16 describes the Spirit-empowered Messiah (1–3) restoring justice to social relationships (3–5); making peace among all God's creatures (6–9); and redeeming and unifying all people, whether Gentile or Jew (10–16). Isaiah 61:1,2 describes the Spirit-empowered Messiah as helping the poor, healing the sick, and liberating the oppressed. Jesus cites this latter prophecy in His inaugural message at



Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21) and in response to the disciples of John the Baptist when they ask whether He is indeed the Messiah (7:18–23).

Two practical actions arise from the realization that the kingdom of God is the fulfillment of all our desires. First, we must desire *more*. God is not interested in what the Stoics called *apatheia*, the elimination of desire. Rather, according to John, when Jesus chases the moneychangers from the Temple, His disciples remember the saying, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17, cf. Psalm 69:9). The problem is not desire per se but rather the lack of desire for the things God wants us to desire. We desire salvation and healing. Do we also pray for justice and peace?

Second, we must desire *with expectation*. In Jesus, the kingdom of God is here (Matthew 12:28). Already, we experience the peace, salvation, and reign of God. Do we pray as if God is in fact “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20)? Or do we hedge our bets and pray double-minded and therefore unanswerable prayers (James 1:7,8)?

PRAYER AS STRUGGLE

And yet, many of our expectant prayers for the *more* of God’s kingdom go unanswered.

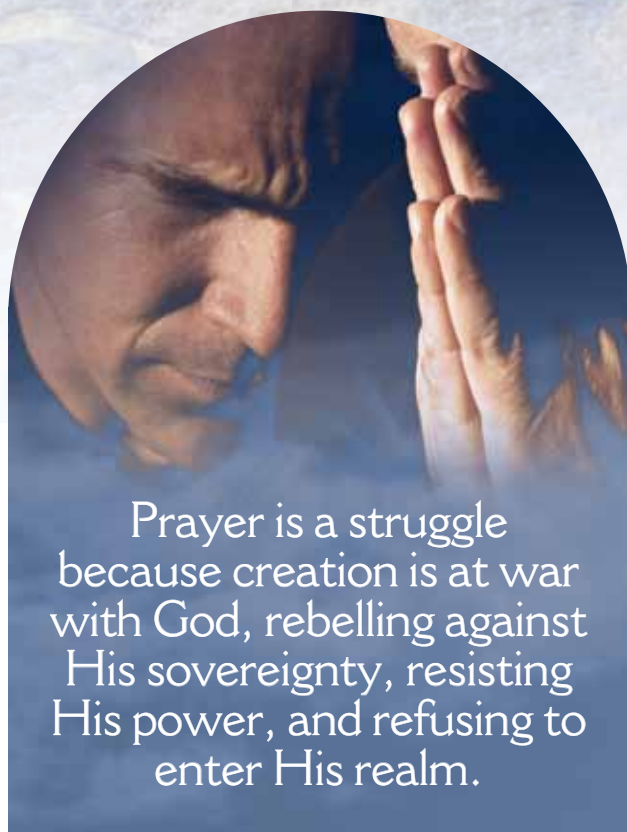
I have spinal arthritis. Every Sunday at church, I go forward and ask the elders to pray for my healing — to date, without effect. Perhaps you have a similar story. Unanswered requests are one reason prayer is such a struggle. Another reason is the spiritual warfare that characterizes our present age.

In modern parlance, *kingdom* is a static term, referring to a place or a realm, such as the United Kingdom or Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the Bible, however, *kingdom* is primarily an abstract and dynamic term, referring to a person’s authority to reign (e.g., Luke 19:12) as well as the actions he takes to establish that reign (e.g., Matthew 12:28).

Taking these three elements together, we might define the Kingdom as God’s authoritative reign, established by His powerful action, and resulting in a realm of peace and salvation for those who receive it with repentance and faith (Mark 1:15).

Prayer is a struggle because creation is at war with God, rebelling against His sovereignty, resisting His power, and refusing to enter His realm.

Oscar Cullman compares our present age to the time between D-Day and V-E Day. On June 6, 1944, when the Allies landed troops on the beaches of Normandy, the war in Europe was effectively over because German forces could not fight successfully on two fronts. But the Nazis fought until May 8, 1945, when they finally surrendered. At His first coming, Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom. Already, sin is being forgiven, demons are being exorcised, sickness is being healed, and death is being overcome through resurrection. But evil fights on. Its



Prayer is a struggle because creation is at war with God, rebelling against His sovereignty, resisting His power, and refusing to enter His realm.

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ultimate defeat awaits the second coming of Jesus, when: “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). We live between the inauguration and consummation of God’s victory, a time of war and struggling prayer. Why doesn’t God use the divine equivalent of a “nuclear option” to end this war immediately?

In Revelation 6:9–11, the Lamb of God opens the fifth seal, and John sees “under the altar [of heaven] the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” According to John, they cry aloud, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (6:10). Instead of answering their cry for justice, God gives each of them “a white robe” and tells them “to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed” (6:11).

This macabre scene has a “missional” point. God delays judgment against creation’s rebels because He still offers them salvation. God’s Word is yet preached; witness to Him is yet given. Prayer is a struggle, then, because the Church has a mission until Jesus returns. Our mission requires godly patience: “[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

One practical consequence arises from the struggle of prayer: Keep praying! Your prayers for the Kingdom may not have been answered at the present time, but they will be answered in God’s timing. “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?” (Luke 18:7).

PRAYER FOR OBEDIENCE

Tony, a good friend of mine, became a wheelchair-bound paraplegic in his teens due to an accident. Raised in a Pentecostal home, he believed God would heal him. A psychiatrist thought his faith was a symptom of delusion and institutionalized him. In the “loony bin” — Tony’s term, not mine — Tony discovered that God is more interested in *wholeness* of heart than bodily *healing*. So, making peace with his paralysis, Tony submitted himself to God’s will and committed himself to God’s service. Then God healed him.

Luke 22:39–46 tells us how Jesus prays on the eve of His crucifixion. “Father, if you are willing,” He says, “take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (22:42). Jesus desires to avoid the Cross. Indeed, His agony is so strong that “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (22:44). And yet, He knows that God desires His obedience, so He submits His will to God’s.

To pray for God’s kingdom and will is to pray for the external and the internal. Tony prayed for health, but also for wholeness. Jesus prayed to avoid pain, but also to submit His will. When we pray, we ask God for the salvation, healing, justice,

and peace of the entire world. But we first must pray that these graces be present in our churches and in our individual lives.

We should arise from prayer with greater unity among believers; greater commitment to the last, the lost, and the least; and greater Christlikeness of personal character. If these things aren’t greater after prayer, have we really prayed at all?

God will establish His kingdom and perform His will, with or without our prayers. When He does so, will we be inside the Kingdom or outside? Will we be found faithful to Him or not? Like Jesus, our prayer must always be: *Not our will, but Yours be done*.

Our Father, make up there down here, but also among us, and especially in me. ☺



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Our DAILY BREAD:

BECOMING GOD'S
ANSWER TO
OUR PRAYERS BY TOM LOFTON

Just as Jesus
taught His
disciples to
depend on God
and ask Him
for their daily
bread, pastors
need to teach
their people
that God is their
provider
for all things
pertaining to their
daily existence.

**"Give us this day our daily
bread" (Matthew 6:11, NKJV).¹**

Bread. The word alone has the power to flood our senses with memories of appetizing smells, delightful tastes, special locations, and unique moments with family and friends.

When I think of bread, I think of my wife's delicious homemade Italian variety, my mother's mouth-watering buttermilk biscuits, and the matchless taste of a fresh Czech loaf of "chleb" from a European bakery in Prague — where I served as a missionary. But bread also can make me think of the millions of children who go hungry each day without even a fallen breadcrumb from the world's table.

In Matthew 6:11, Jesus instructs us to petition the Father for the daily provision of bread, the sustenance of life: "Give us today our daily bread."

Like a good slice of multigrain bread, there are several essentials baked into this sincere plea to the Father. A brief survey of this segment of the Lord's Prayer reveals several key points: the intimacy, dependency, sufficiency, community, and vitality our Heavenly Father desires for His children.




Jesus taught His disciples to depend on God and ask Him for their daily bread. Pastors, likewise, should use the following article as sermon material to teach their people that God is their provider for all things pertaining to their daily existence.

AN INVITATION TO INTIMACY

Scripture describes our relationship with God as an intimate, family relationship: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, NKJV). Matthew shows that God is a loving Father who looks after His children: "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9,11, NKJV).

When Jesus taught us to ask for bread, He did not intend for us to place our request at the counter of a nearby market or with the waiter of a table at a local restaurant. Instead, as God's children, He taught us to call on our Heavenly Father — the Giver of every good and perfect gift — to feed us by His own hand. As coheirs with Christ, He has given us access to Him to ask Him for all things pertaining to our daily existence.

With this in mind, the exchange of the Father's provision for our humble petition is more than servicing an order by a vendor to its client. It is a bountiful blessing given by the loving Father to His beloved children. It is in this context that God seeks communion with those created in His own image.



The exchange of the Father's provision for our humble petition is more than servicing an order by a vendor to its client.

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Our Heavenly Father made His desire for intimacy with His children real to me while I was serving as a missionary in West Philadelphia. A homeless man begging for money approached me as I was exiting a fast-food restaurant with my quick cuisine in a paper bag. His odor of alcohol and cigarettes restrained me from granting his request. Instead I offered him half my lunch and an invitation to hear the good news of Jesus. He was willing to share my lunch but not my gospel presentation.

He quickly devoured his half of the chicken sandwich and ran off with the onion rings. I was offended and pursued him when the Holy Spirit stopped me. "Tommy, you are no different from this homeless man. You are quick to ask, quick to eat, and quick to run. I am asking you, 'When will you be quick to listen?'"

The Father desires that His children know His hand of provision while at the same time wanting us to linger in His presence long enough to know His heart.

DEPENDENCY BY DESIGN

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat. ... Is not life more than food? ... Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:25,26, NKJV).

Every Fourth of July, millions of Americans commemorate Independence Day, a federal holiday in memory of the Continental Congress' adoption of the Declaration of Independence that initiated our breaking away from the tyrannical rule of Great Britain. Out of this cherished historical setting, one of the assumed goals for many citizens in the United States is to be totally independent — free of all dependency on others for the necessities of life. While it is admirable and even scriptural for a person to be responsible to work so he might eat, it can be an overwhelming pressure for an individual who feels isolated in a time of need without the option to depend on someone who can give assistance.

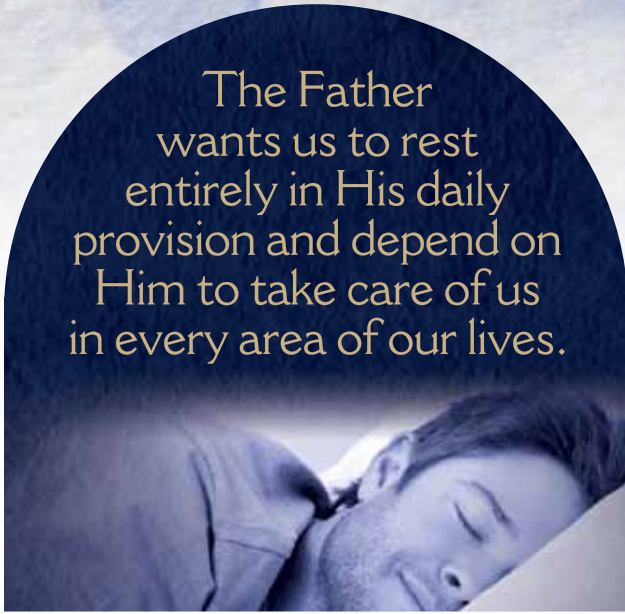
The absence of total trust in God by His children can result in a vast range of negative character traits from pride and self-sufficiency to worry, doubt, panic, depression, and hopelessness. Soon these qualities become strongholds that work to steal from God's children the joy, confidence, and peace their Heavenly Father has given them.

Jesus taught His disciples to depend on God the Father and ask Him for their daily bread. As disciples who obey His instruction, it is important to confess full dependency on Him for the earthly as well as the eternal.

But why bother God for something as elementary and simple as bread? Most of us can pick up a loaf from a grocery store faster than we can pick up our socks from our bedroom floor.

Quite honestly, many people around the world





The Father
wants us to rest
entirely in His daily
provision and depend on
Him to take care of us
in every area of our lives.

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do not have the luxury of considering Matthew 6:11 to be merely figurative or an option for an occasional crisis. Their very existence depends on God to answer their cry for food. They are in desperate need for a supernatural response to their humble plea for the present day.

The Lord's intention in His instruction for us is to learn to trust Him in every area of our lives from the basics of life within immediate reach to the miraculous far beyond our own resources and capabilities. He chooses for us to begin this lesson of faith with bread for each day.

We build the foundation of daily trust in God through prayer for the basics, which can then lead us to a bold faith that believes Him for those things thought impossible. A faith great enough to see a neighbor accept Christ as Savior can grow into a faith that can trust Him to save millions of people who have yet to know the Lord as their Heavenly Father.

Jehovah Jirah, our Provider, promises to supply all our needs. His promises are true. We do not need to worry. There is no need to be anxious. As we completely trust the Father, we can be assured of His blessing. The Father wants us to rest entirely in His daily provision and depend on Him to take care of us in every area of our lives. As the Creator, our loving Father is wholly trustworthy with an ample supply to sufficiently feed all His beloved children all the time.

This is something to really celebrate. As children of our Heavenly Father, we can make every day a Declaration of Dependence on God with complete confidence and peace knowing He who made the promise will make the provision.

SUFFICIENCY THAT IS SUSTAINABLE

David said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25, NKJV).

The Father's feeding program for His children receives "best-practice" recognition for sustainability by all those who have trusted Him throughout history to sufficiently meet their needs for daily bread.

The founder of this feeding program is more than capable of sustaining it. The Bible contains many case studies to prove this point. Perhaps the best known of God's faithfulness in this matter is His provision of bread from heaven for the Israelites while on their 40-year journey in the wilderness. Even in the midst of their murmuring and unfaithfulness to Him, the Father faithfully sustained them with daily food based on His love for them.

From the desert, God's children moved from provision to promise, from manna to milk and honey, without missing a meal. Even today, God wants to encourage all His children that, even when governments and financial institutions fail, His desire to feed us is sustained by His promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away" (Mark 13:31, NKJV).

David, as a child of God, testified concerning the Father sustaining all those who belong to Him by His presence and provision. Sustained by His word, we are saved from the humiliation, insecurity, and uncertainty of begging for bread. We can be confident that our daily bread is available for us not only today but every day. And from this expression of the Father's love for His children, we have been empowered to love our brothers and sisters in the community of faith to which we belong.

CALLED TO COMMUNITY

"Give us this day *our* daily bread" (Matthew 6:11, emphasis added).

Recently in a prayer meeting, the speaker instructed the listeners to take out all the plural pronouns in a Scripture text and replace them with "I" and "me" and "mine."

Without question God loves the "one." The parables in Luke 15 of the one lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son are evidence enough that God cares for the individual. Nevertheless, equally important to Him is His concern and care for the community of His children.

The personal pronouns found in Matthew 6:11 are clearly plural in the original Greek by divine intention. We are not only to consider ourselves in our prayer, but we are to think of our brothers and sisters as we petition the Father for our daily sustenance.

In John 13, Christ gives us a new commandment to love one another even as He and the Father love us. This love for one another is to be a symbol: an icon by which the world recognizes that we are disciples of Jesus. It is from this fountain of love that we are to reach out to those within the community of God's kingdom and ensure that they have food to eat. It begins with prayer: a plea of daily bread for all.

Acts 2 gives us a vivid account of what this type of love looks like as believers sold what they owned to make sure everyone had what he needed. One common expression that spoke of their love of one another was the breaking of bread. In this

simple exercise they communicated their love for the Father and their brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. It was with gladness and purity of heart that they shared such community.

New Testament believers showed a genuine interest in making sure everybody had enough. It was not about “me”; it was about “us.” It was not about celebrities; it was about community. This powerful dynamic lived out in the Early Church was solely inspired by the love of the Father for His children, expressed in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Luke 11:5–8 clearly illustrates the passion and persistence by which we are to petition the Father for daily bread, not just our own needs but for the entire community of faith. “And He said to them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; and he will answer from within and say, “Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you”? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs’ ” (NKJV).

Jesus continues with this encouragement in verse 9, “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” It is interesting that these words of Christ immediately follow His story of friends, food, and “full court pressure” to get the three loaves of bread in the middle of the night for a hungry person. It is also assuring to know that our Father never sleeps nor slumbers. He is awake and alert when we approach Him in prayer for our daily bread. He is always ready to meet our needs for everything pertaining to life.

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**“Listening to a 40-minute sermon
is *not* suffering for Jesus, Sammy.”**

It is with this posture of readiness that we are to reach out to others in the Kingdom community. When Jesus saw people who were hungry, He blessed and broke bread and distributed it to the masses on a mountainside as well as to a few in a small group.

How do we respond to the hungry? In James 2, we learn that mere words are of no value to a brother or sister destitute of daily food. As we receive our daily bread, we must be willing to break it and share with those nearby and far away.

While traveling to 12 of the world’s poorest cities in preparation for Convoy of Hope’s Pray for Hope Pilgrimage, the stories of several pastors in a poverty-stricken nation in sub-Saharan Africa challenged me to the core of my being.

Each one of these saints related the stories of their families going hungry for days and weeks without food. They related how their wives struggled with the lack of interest and tangible assistance from brothers and sisters living in the West while their children went to bed hungry. I was speechless. Not knowing how to respond I simply prayed in my heart to God for His guidance. Quietly the Holy Spirit impressed me to gently remind them of the promises in God’s Word.

Tears began to fill the eyes of these pastors as the presence of God filled the room. In honor of the Father each pastor knelt in unity with one another. Faith rekindled and with a renewed hope we gave thanks together for God’s Word and cried out in unison for the Lord’s intervention and provision. I personally will continue to pray and act until these pastors have the bread and nourishment they need for survival. (Note: We are currently working to get containers of food to these pastors via Convoy of Hope and the Africa regional office of Assemblies of God World Missions.)

Real-life situations such as those of these African pastors should impact us to plea even more earnestly the petition set before us in the Lord’s Prayer. It should also cause us to act — to be readily available for God to use us as an answer to such prayers in providing bread for all in the community of believers.

“Give us this day our daily bread” is an intimate prayer for bread addressed to our Heavenly Father whom we acknowledge in our dependency, His sufficiency, and the community of His children. In this humble posture we will receive God’s provision. Likewise, from this position we must be willing to break the bread we have received from the Father and share it with our brothers and sisters around the world. Jesus said, “To whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48, NKJV).

THE VITALITY OF BROKEN BREAD

Scripture clearly portrays Jesus as the Bread of Life who was broken for us: “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, give us this bread always.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger,

and he who believes in Me shall never thirst' " (John 6:33-35, NKJV). "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body' " (Matthew 26:26). "Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him" (Luke 24:30,31, NKJV).

Witnessing the poverty in some of the world's poorest cities can be overwhelming. Seeing masses of people living on less than a dollar a day without clean drinking water, proper nourishment, and basic medical care can discourage the most optimistic heart, if only for just a moment.

However, in these same urban centers I have met some of God's greatest men and women of faith. These servants of the Lord have an unwavering faith in God's Word and an exuberating vitality that witness of their relationship to Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life.

While in Madagascar, I was with such missionaries and national pastors who are serving the poorest of the world's poor. I was deeply moved as we walked among the people who literally live in the dumps of Antananarivo, the capital. These dumps are mounds of trash that have already been picked through three to four times before arriving at the final destination. Here hungry people search what is left over to somehow help feed their families.

Speaking with one of the Malagasy pastors who ministers to this poverty-stricken community, I asked him how he responds to the well-known statement, "Empty stomachs have no ears." This statement implies that before someone suffering from hunger can hear the good news of Jesus, we must first feed him.

Understanding fully the meaning of this statement, he replied with strong conviction, "In reaching out to those in my community, the first priority is to preach the gospel. I must proclaim with authority that the Light has come to dispel the darkness and to set the captive free. I speak the Word of God, not just for all those to whom we will reach, but as a notice to the powers of darkness that Jesus Christ is present to meet the spiritual as well as the physical needs of those we serve." He recognizes that Jesus is the only real source of hope for the hungry. It is Christ who brings life abundantly, spiritually and physically, to those who accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Reflecting on this pastor's response, I was reminded again of how Jesus is the Bread of Life now and for eternity. It is when we as His body are blessed and broken and given away that those in need will realize the Resurrection power that comes from an intimate relationship with God.

It is in breaking bread, both tangible and eternal, shared with one another and distributed to the hungry, that the world will have a revelation of the Giver of Life — Jesus and His love for the world, both individually and in community, now and for all eternity.

So as we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," let us be encouraged and thankful for the intimacy we have with our Heavenly Father, being ever dependent on Him and His sufficient supply to meet our needs and those of the community. 🙏

NOTE

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Convoy of Hope is a faith-based organization with a driving passion to feed the world through children's feeding initiatives, community outreaches, disaster response, and partner resourcing. For more information on the worldwide ministries of Convoy of Hope, go to <http://www.convoyofhope.org/>. To learn how you can donate or volunteer, go to <http://www.convoyofhope.org/go/how>.



THE PRAYER THAT GOD ALWAYS ANSWERS

BY JASON FRENN

The Lord's Prayer is a scriptural model for helping people in your church draw closer to God through initial conversion and ongoing confession.

The deputy carefully searched my belongings, then motioned me to walk through the metal detector. After the guard behind the 1-inch-thick bullet-proof glass pushed the button, the 300-pound security door slammed behind me, echoing throughout the facility that held nearly 1,000 inmates. "Clear!" The guard exclaimed. It was obvious I had passed from a world of freedom into one I had never seen before. To my left and right prisoners silently stared as I made my way through the maze of the county jail.

Most of the crusades I hold are in stadiums, sports arenas, or convention centers. I have never had armed guards posted in strategic locations. However, that afternoon was different. Deputies stood in towers with loaded rifles overlooking the courtyard. Jailers escorted the men into the area in single file, hands folded together



just above their navels. Soon a sea of orange jumpsuits filled the common area and prisoners began to do a variety of calisthenics.

Just before officials introduced me, I glanced across the courtyard and saw men who were doing time for dealing drugs, gang violence, drunken driving, and murder. They were young and old alike. One man in particular had a physical appearance like no other. Inmates nicknamed him "Tarzan." I've never seen a man so buff. He dropped to the ground and began to do pushups but never stopped staring at me. He never turned away. It was intimidating to say the least. He was like a lion watching for the opportune moment to attack its prey.

After a 25-minute message concluding with my testimony, I asked, "How many of you want God's forgiveness?" Over half raised their hands. Tarzan stopped his rigorous exercise regime and stood to his feet. He continued to glare at me through the chain-link fence. After 3 seconds, which seemed like an eternity, his hand shot up. That afternoon several hundred prisoners asked Christ to forgive their sin so they could begin a new life with God.

As I led them in a simple prayer asking God to erase their spiritual debts, I more fully understood that at the core of the human heart is a vital need that only God can satisfy. While there are few people who may seem indifferent, most want to be at peace with God. They want a sense that their outstanding debts are settled. Asking God to forgive us is the only way to fulfill that need. It is the only way we can make things right between God and us.

The greatest threat or challenge to our lives is not political or financial. It is not substance abuse or Internet addiction. It is not gang violence, drunken driving, or murder. It is not racism or social injustice. The greatest threat or challenge to our lives is sin. Sin is a silent and deadly cancer that permeates every level of society. God offers one cure for sin, and if we accept it, He will forgive our sin and the spiritual debts we carry.

This article looks at the Lord's Prayer found in Luke 11 as a scriptural model for helping the people in your church begin a relationship with Christ through conversion, confession, and forgiveness. Three important steps are discussed to help people leave a life of sin and experience the forgiveness that every person needs. Let's examine the first four words of Luke 11:4, "Forgive us our sins." This is a prayer God always answers.

STEP ONE: HELP PEOPLE SEE THAT EVERYONE NEEDS FORGIVENESS

Jesus gave us this prayer suggesting that every person has an account to settle with God. The prayer presupposes that no one is perfect. No one is inherently holy. Everyone needs forgiveness because we all carry the seeds of destruction (Romans 3:23).

My parents separated when I was 3 and divorced when I was 9. My mom remarried when I was 15. My family struggled



with addiction and discord. Between my three parents, there are nine divorces. The first time I walked into a church I did not need to hear that I was a sinner. I felt like an outsider as soon as I got out of the car. I knew there was a problem, and I was ready to do something about it. I needed the power to break the sinful pattern over my life.

Unlike me, there are some people who feel they are good and believe God will cut them some slack. There is only one problem with that belief: being good is not good enough (Ephesians 2:8,9).

In every crusade I start with the assumption that regardless of family background or the way a person feels about himself everyone carries seeds of destruction. Everyone has a sin nature and must reconcile his spiritual debts.

I am very much aware that my job is not to convict people of sin. This is what the Holy Spirit does. My job is to deliver a message of hope that God will help people break the sinful patterns that keep them bound. Before we can ask God to forgive us we must first recognize that we have a sin problem. This is my starting point in every crusade. I believe God leads people from a point of recognizing that they have a sin problem to a holy solution.

STEP TWO: SHOW PEOPLE THAT ASKING GOD FOR FORGIVENESS IS ESSENTIAL TO THEIR FREEDOM

After recognizing that everyone carries seeds of destruction, people need to become transparent regarding their spiritual debts in a manner that is genuine and sincere. Confession of sin is essential to forgiveness (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). It is nonnegotiable. Confession allows people to take ownership of their mistakes and have a brand new start.

Each day on my live radio program I try to bring listeners to a point of decision. After sharing a compelling testimony or story that illustrates God's power, I ask: "Do you carry a burden that seems overwhelming? Do you wish you could begin a new life? Is your account with God in debt? If so, you can wipe the slate clean and start a new life today. Don't wait, settle your account with God today." I encourage people to call the network headquarters (Radio Nueva Vida, covering 200 cities in the United States and Latin America) where they can pray with a counselor and begin a life with Christ. Thousands of people call each year. They confess their sin and ask God to forgive them. By sharing their spiritual debts with someone over the phone they have a greater sense of ownership of their mistakes and take seriously their commitment to Christ.

When people pray, "God, I am sorry. Please forgive my sin," this is a huge step in their spiritual development. This is why confession is important for every believer, new and old alike. In essence, the Lord's Prayer, because of its call for transparency, should be on our lips frequently.

When people come to an altar in a crusade, the Holy Spirit brings conviction for the sin they have harbored. At the same

time, He brings forgiveness and a sense of hope that He will set them free from the destructive patterns that have held them captive.

Enrique was a taxi driver who picked us up at the hotel in Havana, Cuba. We were headed to a house church about 45 minutes outside the capital city. Along the way we asked him about his life. He told us that he was divorced with three children. He went on to say, "My life is really complicated. I am one of the biggest womanizers on this island. That's why my wife divorced me. As if that isn't enough, I drink and smoke three packs a day. I've tried to stop my crazy behavior, but I am not sure what it's going to take."

When we arrived at our destination, I asked him, "Why don't you join us at our speaking engagement? We will need a ride back to the hotel when we conclude at 10 p.m. If you stay, we will pay your meter."

He said, "You have a deal."

After a short introduction and exchange of handshakes, the pastor escorted us through the kitchen and into the patio area of the pastor's house. The crowd continued to grow until nearly 120 people were gathered together. Enrique took a seat in the front row.

As several of us shared about how God broke the patterns of sinful behavior and transformed our lives, Enrique wiped tears from his eyes.

Then I shared my testimony. As I concluded the message, I asked: "How many of you want God's forgiveness so you can begin a new life today?" Nearly half the hands went up.

Enrique raised both his hands, jumped to his feet, and said, "I do. I want to start my life again."

THE ART OF THE ALTAR CALL

What brings people to an altar? When you give an invitation, there are four things that never change.

First, we must remember that God wants to reach people and transform their lives more than we do (John 3:16,17).

Second, people desperately need His power and His presence in their lives. Whether it is someone who does not know Christ or someone who simply needs a miracle in his body, everyone needs an encounter with God (Acts 10:38).

As I close my message, I try to remember that I am fulfilling my call when I create an opportunity where people can be saved, delivered, renewed, and healed by our Lord. The altar call is one of the great tools God uses to do just that.

Third, every preacher who regularly gives an invitation asks the Holy Spirit for discernment to understand those who are lost (John 1:4,5; 1 Corinthians 2:12–14). Moreover, whether it is the pain of the alcoholic, the loneliness of the depressed, or the hurt of the abused, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me understand those who are in the audience.

Fourth, expect people to respond, and expect God to back you. Exercise your faith and believe God will touch their lives, because He will (Mark 11:22).

People come to an altar because they believe God will meet them there. So persuade them that He loves them, cares deeply about their needs, and will meet them right where they are. He saves, delivers, renews, and heals those who seek Him (Luke 11:9).

— JASON FRENN



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A truly free life
comes when people
make confession
an ongoing process.

After we said goodbye to the pastor and his family, the six of us got back into the minivan, and Enrique drove us back to the hotel. He said, "I just want you to know that I used to be the worst man on this island, an undisciplined, middle-aged man with a huge hole in his heart. But something happened to me tonight. It started on the way to the house church. When I walked into the kitchen, I felt something I have never felt before. Then when I heard your stories about how God helped you overcome the difficulties you used to face, I was able to see that there is hope for me. God is the only one who can fill that hole in my heart."

That night Enrique sincerely confessed his sin and asked God to forgive him. He realized he needed to change, and he made the commitment to live a transparent life before the One who is capable of changing him.

True spiritual freedom comes when people open their hearts and confess their sins to the Lord. A truly free life comes when people expect God to move and are truly transparent before the King. It comes when people make confession an ongoing process, the third step.

STEP THREE: TEACH PEOPLE THAT CONFESSION LIBERATES THE SOUL AND IS AN ONGOING PRACTICE

Jesus included the petition for the forgiveness of sin in the Lord's Prayer so every time we pray there would be a way to settle our spiritual debts with God. Christ gave us a model for ongoing renewal and spiritual cleansing. Asking God to forgive us on a regular basis is necessary and keeps our hearts humble and pure.

Weeds filled my yard when my family and I lived in Central

America. The gardener would remove them about once a month. Within 3 weeks, they were back. Finally, I asked him why it was so difficult to have a weed-free yard. His response was surprising. "The birds," he said. "They believe it's their job to spread the seed. Unless you can get rid of all the birds, you will just have to keep cleaning out the weeds."

The same is true regarding the buildup of destructive sinful patterns in people's lives. Many things influence the way people think and act. Some are helpful and some are not. When people ask God to forgive them their sins, they become transformed by the renewing of their minds. It is like the weeding process of a gardener. Every so often believers need to clean out the accumulation of weeds. We do this by asking the Lord to forgive us on an ongoing basis. This is a regular spiritual maintenance that must be done.

This is where transformation happens in the lives of those who come to Christ. When we live a transparent life before the Lord and sincerely ask Him to forgive us, He breaks spiritual strongholds, shatters chains, and opens prison doors. People who have been held captive for years suddenly see the light as the power of God sets them free. ☺



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Several of the concepts on forgiveness in this article come from Jason's newest book, *Power To Reinvent Yourself*. Used by permission of the publisher, FaithWords.

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CHOOSING FORGIVENESS:

A BOLD CHOICE FOR A PEACEFUL HEART

Just as Jesus taught
His disciples how to forgive,
pastors need to remind
their people that if they want
God's best for their lives,
His plan, His will, the future
He planned for them
from eternity past, they
will need to do the work of
forgiveness.

BY LORI O'DEA

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following essay may be used to supplement sermon material when teaching and preaching on forgiveness. This article provides valuable insights on why and how to forgive.



On June 2, 2010, Detroit Tiger Armando Galarraga had pitched a perfect game — for eight and two-thirds innings.

Twenty-six batters up, 26 batters out. His own catcher did not even realize what was happening until the seventh inning, but the



Illustrated by Gary Locke

head umpire, Jim Joyce, had been aware of the historical implications since inning five. With two outs in the ninth, and a 3-1 count, the fans held their collective breath as the 27th batter was thrown out at first. Then the unthinkable happened. Joyce called him safe, and perfection vanished.

The outrage reached epic proportions, earning public proclamations from state lawmakers and even a joking reference in the White House Press Room. But in baseball, there is no “undo” button. Joyce, watching the replay after the game, admitted his error. It tore him up. Angry fans, and even some of Galarraga’s teammates, called for action. Everyone seemed to have a vested interest in the situation, everyone except for Galarraga.

The next day he was sitting in front of his locker, completely calm. One of his teammates said, “I don’t think he really understands what a perfect game is.” But Galarraga understood. He had been playing professionally for a decade. He had bounced between teams and from minor to major leagues, and 28 years old or not, immigrant or not, he understood his own sport.

His response? “Nobody is perfect,” Galarraga said.

“Inside of my heart, I don’t have any problem.”¹

“Inside of my heart, I don’t have any problem.”

What a perfect way to describe the condition God desires for all of us: Freedom from the bondage of sin, freedom from the pain of disappointment

and betrayal. Prayers of forgiveness make possible both conditions. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He planted — in the heart of that prayer — a call to forgiveness. We seek God’s forgiveness (“Forgive us our debts,” Matthew 6:12), even as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us (“as we also have forgiven our debtors”).

FORGIVENESS MATTERS

Forgiveness matters a lot. Besides going against the litigious grain of society, forgiveness captures the divine character. The *dictionary.com* entry defines it this way:

“for·give [fer-giv] 1. to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, debt, etc.); absolve. 2. to give up all claim on account of; remit (a debt, obligation, etc.). 3. to grant pardon to (a person). 4. to cease to feel resentment against: *to forgive one’s enemies*. 5. to cancel an indebtedness or liability of: to forgive the interest owed on a loan.”²

But much more powerful than this sanitized, forensic definition are the spiritual truths that back genuine forgiveness:

1. Christ died on the Cross — paying our sin debt for us and making a way for the forgiveness of our sins.
2. Jesus said we must forgive to be forgiven.
3. Holding on to a hurt only hurts us more.

Forgiveness matters because life hurts. It is not possible to go through life unscathed. Somewhere along the way someone is going to betray you, lie about you, abuse you, disappoint you, or insult you. We do not make it out of our toddler years without experiencing an “owie” or two, and even if we did,



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the elementary school playground would ensure our thorough acquaintance with physical, emotional, and relational pain.

Forgiveness matters because without it we miss God's best. If you want God's best for your life, His plan, His will, the future He planned for you from eternity past, you will need to do the work of forgiveness. God's best for us is not an endless cycle of failure and disappointment. He wants us to draw near to Him and keep going after Him. The only way to clear the debris life incurs is to forgive.

Forgiveness matters because our lives cannot depend on the actions of others. Some contend that we cannot offer forgiveness without the offender first repenting. I disagree. Forgiveness is my choice. Listen again to the words of Stephen as the members of the Sanhedrin were stoning him, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60), and Jesus as He hung on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

WHY SHOULD I FORGIVE?

"Why should I?" whines a child. But adults utter it frequently, if not justifiably. After all, if I am the one someone hurt or betrayed, why should I forgive? Let's look at some of the best reasons we should forgive.

Jesus said to forgive (Matthew 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37). Forgiveness is a matter of obedience, and as the Holy Spirit will be quick to remind us, what we know to do and do not, is sin (James 4:17).

But the reason Jesus gave in the postscript to the Lord's Prayer can also be profoundly motivating: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14,15).

Why would God withhold from us the thing that is so essential? Because our refusing to forgive indicates unbelief. We either do not believe we must forgive, or we believe that God's grace is sufficient to enable us to forgive, or that the character of God being formed in us requires it. Any way you look at it, we do not believe, and believing is the most basic thing God requires of us.

Forgiving gives me freedom. Someone said that unforgiveness is taking poison and hoping someone else will die. What a great word picture. Holding onto the judgment and hatred only has power to hurt us. We lose. We are in bondage to it.

Forgiving safeguards my health. Unforgiveness adds stress, and stress kills. But beyond that, unforgiveness can cripple your immune system. Researchers have tied unforgiveness to back pain, ulcers, cancer, headaches, and other debilitating, even life-threatening physical problems. To forgive is a proactive move to protect your health.

Forgiving allows the enemy no foothold (Ephesians 4:26,27;



We need the grace of God
and faith in His Word
to follow through with
what seems like
a counterintuitive act.

2 Corinthians 2:10,11). Satan exploits weaknesses in our lives. Unforgiveness can be a festering sore of weakness that feeds a negative attitude, critical spirit, and doubt.

Jesus highlighted the significance of forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12,14,15).

- Forgiveness is essential to our spiritual health. The Lord's Prayer emphasizes worship, submission, provision, deliverance, and, at the very core of the prayer, forgiveness. Prayer, which is our lifeline of communication to the Heavenly Father, nourishes our relationship with God. Jesus basically includes two focal points in His teaching: our dependence on God and clearing the path of any hurdle to that relationship — be it personal sin, attack from the enemy, or unforgiveness toward others.
- Forgiveness is daily business. Jesus gave this prayer as an example of what one should tend to on a daily basis. "Give us *today* our *daily* bread" is a request for nothing more than the needs of the day. Everything else in the prayer connects to that daily frequency, as well. Among them? Forgiveness. Ask God to forgive your sins. Forgive others of theirs. Keep the accounting fresh. Don't stockpile.
- Forgiveness is the heart of fellowship. Tending relationships — with our Lord and with the relationships we have with others — is deemed to be an integral part of our spiritual journey. Broken fellowship with your spouse, a family member, a friend, or coworker is unpleasant enough, and cumulatively, can have some unpleasant consequences (including unanswered prayer, Psalm 66:18; 1 Peter 3:7,12). But broken fellowship with our Lord is even more serious.
- Forgiveness is a matter of prayer. The bottom line is that Jesus included this subject in His prayer, teaching us to pray, because it is just that — a matter of prayer. We cannot forgive without His help. We cannot expect our relationships to be right without forgiving.

HOW DO I FORGIVE?

First things first: Do I need to offer forgiveness? Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." You may have experienced something minor that you can overlook. But if you keep coming back to this offense, or if you hold it against the other person, then you are not overlooking it. It is to our credit to overlook a minor offense. It is not to our credit to overlook *all* offenses. If we use Proverbs 19:11 as an excuse not to confront problems in our lives, we build false justification for not offering forgiveness. This is not the intent of this passage.

Pray for God's help to forgive. We need the grace of God and faith in His Word to follow through with what seems like a counterintuitive act. Forgiveness is not pretending the offense did not happen.

Ken Sande offers the following example of a prayer for God's help to forgive: "God, I cannot forgive him in my own strength. In fact, I do not want to forgive him, at least until he has suffered for what he did to me. He does not deserve to get off easy. Everything in me wants to hold it against him and keep a high wall between us so he can never hurt me again. But Your Word warns me that unforgiveness will eat at my soul and build a wall between You and me. More important, You have shown me that You made the supreme sacrifice, giving up Your own Son, in order to forgive me. Lord, please help me to want to forgive. Please change my heart and soften it so I no longer want to hold this against him. Change me so I can forgive and love him the way You have forgiven and loved me."³

There is a lot of value in a prayer like this. You process all of the emotion tied to the offense in a productive place. But

know that God also hears a prayer that simply says, "Lord, help me to forgive."

Pray for awareness of your part in the offense (and ask forgiveness). This can be either before or after the offense.

- Before: Did I say or do something to which the person responded? We do not bear responsibility for another person's wrongful words or actions, but we are responsible for our actions and must deal with that sin.
- After: Did I respond to the offense with behavior or words that require forgiveness? This kind of escalation can be difficult to see through. We want to place all responsibility on the other person with the simple reasoning of a child, "He started it."

Forgive to the level of your understanding at that point (forgiveness can be both event and process).⁴ Forgive what you know to forgive. Identify the offender and the offense. It may be for the act of the offense itself or for the initial emotional impact. What you know, deal with. If possible, offer forgiveness in person (if safe to do so), but definitely make it a matter of prayer, taking the person to the Lord and releasing him from the wrong done to you.

Then allow for the possibility that the Holy Spirit may identify residual fallout that needs to be forgiven. This is like pulling a weed. You may get the surface plant at the first pass, then part of the root, but until you get the entire thing, it is not dead. It can still come back.

HOW DO I KNOW I HAVE REALLY FORGIVEN SOMEONE?

I'm walking in humility (Ephesians 4:2). Giving forgiveness is no time to be a martyr, or proud, or better than someone. Quite the opposite. Offering forgiveness should be a reminder of our constant need for it.

I am praying for the person (positively, asking blessing). This clarification is necessary because it is possible to pray something along the lines of an imprecatory psalm: "God, get him. This no-good, dirty, rotten, mean person deserves Your backhand like no one I have ever known. Break his teeth (that's scriptural), take his job, his health, his dog. Hurt him times 10."

If your prayer regarding the offender still follows these sentiments, chances are you still have some work to do. But if you genuinely desire no ill will for the person, if you can pray for him, and if better still, you can bless him, then it indicates full forgiveness. The first one will do, but going the full distance of blessing brings the most freedom.

I keep no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). Forgiveness means wiping out the debt. It is an all or nothing transaction. Forgiveness means that I refuse to punish the person. I do not gossip about the person or refer to the offense again.

I have peace. This is probably one of the most powerful evidences of genuine forgiveness. When unforgiveness dominates

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"She believes the higher it is, the closer she is to God."

our lives, we are trapped in a vicious cycle of replaying the offense, justifying ourselves, trying to figure out how to rewrite history, falling prey to the “if onlys,” and other detrimental dead ends. All of these cease with forgiveness. Real peace rules in our hearts (Colossians 3:15), and our focus is clear to see what God has next.

Clear focus on the Father and hearts free of problems are just two of the benefits Jesus envisioned for us. When He gave the simple guidance to pray for forgiveness, this was predicated on our already having forgiven others. Jesus knew it was anything but simple, but He also knew that through prayer, genuine forgiveness is possible and necessary. 🙏

NOTES

1. Shawn Windsor, “Armando Galarra Gets a New Corvette, Praise From Jim Joyce,” *The Detroit Free Press*, <http://www.freep.com/article/20100604/SPORTS02/6040329/>

Armando-Galarra-gets-a-new-Corvette--praise-from-Jim-Joyce. (No longer available, 07/20/2010).

2. *Dictionary.com*. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/forgive>.
3. Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker: A Biblical Guide To Resolving Personal Conflict*. Third Edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 205.
4. Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Choosing Forgiveness: Your Journey to Freedom* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008) 178. Note: The author advocates forgiving to the level of your understanding at that point, but contradictorily maintains that forgiveness is not a process.



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SIDESTEP FORGIVENESS TRAPS

Navigating the emotionally explosive territory of forgiveness requires awareness of the faulty acts associated with forgiveness. King David identified some of the pitfalls in his prayer for forgiveness: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:16,17). Other meaningless offerings include:

Buying Forgiveness

One of the shortcuts to forgiveness — actually, more of a poor substitute — is our attempt to buy forgiveness. People do it all the time with God, believing they have something worthwhile to offer God that could cover their sins. We call this a works-righteousness mentality. And we try this with each other, too. (Think of Jacob and Esau.) But at the end of the day, can stuff erase the debt? No.

Forgiving Yourself

A lot of people teach this concept, including evangelical preachers and authors, but not the Bible. You will not find the principle anywhere. Forgiving ourselves violates the concept of the sin-debt transaction. My sin is against God. He alone can forgive. If my sin involves others, they can offer forgiveness, and I may need to offer restitution if possible. But first

and always, my sin is against God. I need His forgiveness first and most.

Forgiving God

A sure indication of unforgiveness is spending time in the cycle of blame. It gets especially ugly if that blame leads us to an indictment against God. If we judge Him to be at fault, we have just walked into dangerous territory. Why? Because He is, by nature, perfect in His justice and righteousness.

More dangerous, though, is the teaching that we must forgive God, which means we have judged Him and found Him to have missed the mark, to have sinned. And that is a lie. We need to wrestle with God's role in our lives, and especially in the tragedies. But the only thing that will ever set us free is the truth. And the truth is always that God does not lie. God does not forsake. God's ways are higher than our ways. God's will be done.

Looking Back

Forgiving and forgetting is a myth. God requires us to forgive; we can live productively in healthy relationship to the memories. If anyone understood the power of a shameful past, it was the apostle Paul. He had endorsed the murder of Christians in an effort to wipe out the Church. How was he able to move on from such a treacherous past to be effective in the Lord's service?

Listen to his words, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13,14). In the context, “what is behind” includes both the good and the bad. Paul was not going to let the bad disqualify him or the good deceive him into coasting. Forgetting is a deliberate act of putting behind, not of wiping out memory.

— LORI O'DEA



TEACH US
TO PRAY



LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION: PRAYING *for* HOLINESS

BY JAMES T. BRADFORD

Illustrated by Jared VanBruaene

To fully appreciate the importance of the phrase “Lead us not into temptation” from the Lord’s Prayer, it is helpful first to understand how temptation works in order to grasp the **temptation process** — the setup, the wear down, and the kill.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following essay can be used to supplement sermon material when teaching and preaching on living the overcoming life. This essay provides valuable insights on how your congregation can pray strategically and specifically toward living a holy life.

I can resist everything except temptation," confessed Oscar Wilde. We smile as we wince. With the simple prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," Jesus reminds us of what every human being knows all too well. Temptation is everywhere and we are all vulnerable. Often resistance seems futile and willpower feels inadequate. Erwin Lutzer got it right: "Temptation is not a sin; it is a call to battle."

Temptation is a battle because sin is more than just a choice — it is a power, a preying force. God told Cain, "Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you" (Genesis 4:7). To live in our world is to be surrounded by flesh-enticing influences that pull at our souls, lure our affections, and seduce our wills.

The simple prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," however, gives us hope that we do not have to fight this battle alone. Here Jesus invites us to depend on our hallowed, Heavenly Father. By praying for personal purity, we can overcome temptation and advance the front lines of holiness in our lives.

Martin Luther insightfully connects temptation and prayer this way: "God delights in our temptations and yet hates them. He delights in them when they drive us to prayer; He hates them when they drive us to despair."

But what does it mean to pray, "Lead us not into temptation"? Does God intentionally tempt us unless we ask Him not to? Is Jesus asking us to pray, "Lord, please don't set me up to be ruined"?

We find the resolving perspective in James 1:13: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." So however we understand, "Lead us not into temptation," it cannot mean that God plays the role of tempter.

The key lies in the Greek word that both Jesus and James use for temptation — *peirasmos*. It can mean temptation in a specific sense, as in James 1:13, but it can also mean "testing" in a general sense. Not every "test" is a "temptation," but every "temptation" is a "test." And we do know that God allows tests of all kinds to strengthen our faith and work holiness into the fabric of our lives (Hebrews 12:10).

The danger is that testings of any kind can overwhelm us. Instead of making us stronger, they may actually trip us up and trap us. So if it is a

given that God does not himself tempt us to sin, then Jesus is teaching us to pray, "Protect us in those areas of testing where we are vulnerable, keep us from those sins that ensnare us, and strengthen us not to fail." In other words, "Lead us not into temptation."

This is a protecting, empowering prayer that acknowledges our weakness in the face of moral testing and therefore our need for God's greater power to prevail. Jesus is teaching us that we are always praying in the will of God when we pray for the Holy Spirit's power to resist evil, to free us from sinful habits, and to strengthen us to make overcoming choices.

THE ANATOMY OF TEMPTATION

To fully appreciate the importance of Jesus' prayer, it is helpful first to understand how temptation works. After clarifying that God himself does not tempt with evil, James describes the three distinct phases of the temptation process — the setup, the wear down, and the kill.

James states, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away [the setup] and enticed [the wear down]. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death [the kill]" (James 1:14,15). The foolish young man of Proverbs 7:6–8 is a case study in these three steps. It begins with the setup:

"At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in."

This young man was playing fast and loose with his boundaries. He was being set up for a fall by first of all wandering into the wrong neighborhood — "walking along in the direction of her house" (verse 8). Meanwhile, he was also allowing patterns of secrecy in his life — "at twilight ... as the dark of night set in." He also underestimated what he was dealing with. His carelessness was no match for temptation's aggressiveness: "Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent" (verse 10).

This setup phase incubates the desires by which we are "dragged away" (James 1:14). Then comes the wear down. Here our resistance to temptation is eroded and we are actively "enticed" to sin (James 1:14). Sin started with a play to his ego.

Proverbs 7:13 shows how sin strokes our ego: "She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: 'I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you.'"

This young man fell for the "you are someone special and you deserve this" line. What follows next is the involvement of all five of his senses, trapping him in his own "sensuality." With her seductive voice [sound] (verse 21), she lures him in: "I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt [sight].



I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon [smell]. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning [taste]; let's enjoy ourselves with love [touch]" (verses 16–18).

At this point, all he needs for his resistance to be completely worn down is the mental permission to do what he knows he shouldn't. The temptress is quick to provide the rationalization: "My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon" (verses 19,20).

No one can sin without lying to himself or herself. Temptation deceives us, causing us to rationalize that we will not get caught; that no one will know; that no one will get hurt; that it is no use resisting; that we have a right to do this; that we deserve it; that God will not care. Because this young man allows his senses to overrule his God-given judgment, he succumbs to her enticement: "With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk" (verse 21).

Then comes the kill. Temptation sets him up and wears him down. What follows is so human, yet so tragic. "All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life" (verse 22).

STRATEGIC PRAYING

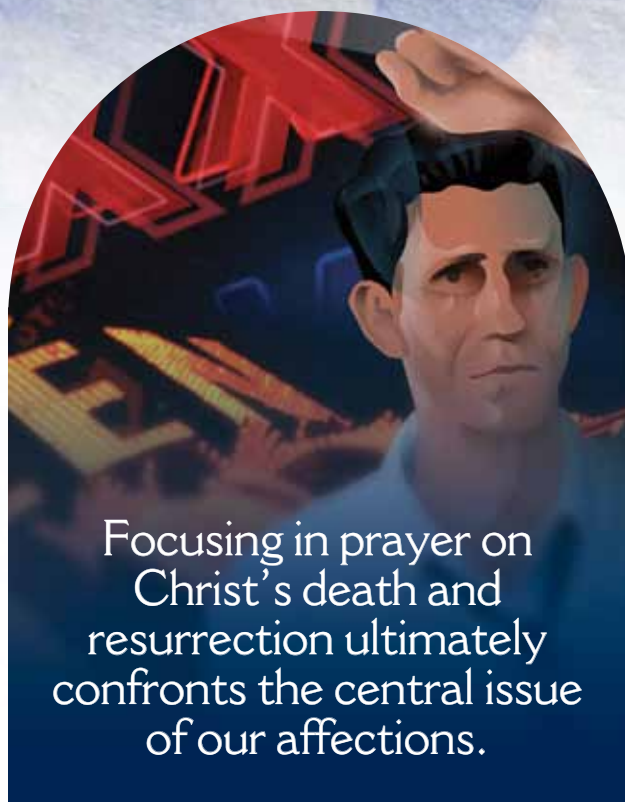
Clearly moralistic legalism and teeth-gritting willpower will not win the day when it comes to taking on this kind of battle. Paul warns us of as much in Colossians 2:21,23: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! ... Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom ... but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

We need something beyond ourselves that can tame the "evil desires" of the human heart and give us new affections. That, in essence, is what we are praying for when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

Thankfully, these divine, spiritual resources can be ours through prayer because of Christ's death and resurrection. To help us in our tendency to be set up or "dragged away" with wrong desires, we have the resources of the crucified life. And to counter the wear-down "enticements" of temptation we have the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit. Here, therefore, are some ways to pray strategically and specifically toward a holy life.

PRAYING TO AVOID THE SETUP

First, focus in prayer on the cross of Christ and, by faith, lay hold of the reality that you are dead to sin because of the Cross. In Christ you are no longer a slave to the evil desires that set you up. This means having the ability to be as unresponsive as a dead person to sin's allurements. It starts, however, with prayerful faith that might need to defy your feelings. Paul



reminds you: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with. ... In the same way count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:6,11).

Second, seek and believe for the supernatural deliverance and protection of Christ over your life. At the Cross Satan is disarmed (Colossian 2:15) and victory over his deceptions and power is given to you.

Third, ask the Lord to help you set boundaries in life that will keep you away from areas of personal vulnerability. Seek God for the courage to avoid the patterns of secrecy that, like the foolish man of Proverbs 7, have you wandering into the wrong neighborhoods under the cover of secrecy's darkness.

Fourth, pray for the "fear of the Lord." Ask for a revelation of God's holiness that will humble you and keep your heart repentant and obedient. God said, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

Last, pray as you read through Proverbs, centering on the choices you make in life. Read the verses slowly and then pray them back one by one to God, as a personal request for a lifestyle of holiness.

PRAYING TO RESIST THE WEAR DOWN

Pray constantly to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Make it your most important personal request. The Holy Spirit brings the resurrection life of Jesus to make you alive to righteousness and to help you live obediently to Christ in your vulnerable, mortal body. Paul gives you hope: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through

his Spirit, who lives in you" (Romans 8:11).

Ask the Lord to help you to be personally disciplined. Unlike the foolish young man of Proverbs 7, trust the Lord to give you strength to say no to sensual stimuli and the courage you will need to stop always giving yourself whatever you want.

Ask God to reveal to you those areas of deception and misbelief that underlie sinful patterns. How are you rationalizing sin by lying to yourself about God, about yourself, about those around you, or about sin's consequences?

Make your prayer times more than just reciting a list of prayer requests. Practice what the apostle Paul calls "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14). Take time to adore God and to encounter His presence at a heart level. Meditate on Him silently and praise Him verbally. Pray in tongues. Yield your soul and your affections to Him. Let His righteous heart fill yours. As Jude instructs, "Build yourself up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20).

NEW AFFECTIONS

It becomes clear that focusing in prayer on Christ's death and resurrection ultimately confronts the central issue of our affections. In the words of P.T. Forsythe, "Unless there is within us that which is above us, we shall soon yield to that which is around us."

At the heart of all our idolatries and sinful patterns is the problem of our false affections or "evil desires" (James 1:14). The apostle John warns: "Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

Another John, a personal friend of mine, was named Firefighter of the Year by the Los Angeles Fire Department several years ago. He is a tough guy who is a fervent follower of Jesus and who has personally led many other strong men to Jesus. He once described to me how a mentor of his had challenged him to get up every morning and pray, "Lord, help me to love what You love and hate what You hate."

That is a prayer that foundationally shapes and reinforces us at the level of our affections. It is said of Jesus, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness" (Hebrews 1:9). Praying, "Lead us not into temptation," is ultimately praying that our affections will be conformed to His.

The Scottish preacher and writer Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) once preached a sermon entitled "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." We need the expulsive power of a passion for God that consumes our hearts, pushing out those false, worldly affections that feed on lust, greed, and pride. It is a question of our hearts and what we love.

So may we pray as Chalmers prayed, "O may Thy Spirit, who caused this world of beauty and order to emerge from chaos, operate with like effect on my dark, turbid, and ruined soul." Or, as Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." ☉



The PROVERBS 7 PRESCRIPTION for DEFEATING TEMPTATION

Avoiding the Setup

- Put up boundaries (7:8).
- Avoid secrecy (7:9).
- Stay alert (7:10–12).

Resisting the Wear Down

- Pursue emotional and spiritual wholeness (7:13,14).
- Learn the discipline of delayed gratification (7:16–18).
- Replace rationalization with truth (7:19,20).

Countering the Kill (7:22,23)

- Embrace another kind of death: a crucified, resurrected life in Jesus.

Words of Hope

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:21).

"The devil tempts that he may ruin; God tests that he may crown." — St. Ambrose

"How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible." — C.S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*

— JAMES T. BRADFORD



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TEACH US
TO PRAY

THE TESTING *of* YOUR FAITH

THE MEANING OF
PEIRASMOS
IN THE LORD'S
PRAYER

BY ISAAC CANALES

Illustrated by Jared VanBreaene



Why suffering is a necessary common denominator of the Christian experience and what our afflictions teach us about trusting God.

Kristen Stendahl, my teacher at Harvard Divinity School, called the Lord's Prayer the "Lordly Prayer" because of its profound and simple majesty. The word *peirasmōs* can mean at least two different things in this "prayer of all prayers" (Matthew 6:13). It can mean 1) temptation, or 2) a test or trial.¹ Traditionally, people often understand the word *peirasmōs* as *temptation*: "And lead us not into temptation."

When we think of *peirasmōs* as trial or test, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness often comes to mind (Matthew 4:1). In the wilderness the evil one, Satan, both tempts and tests Jesus. The temptation to a moral failure almost pales in significance to the challenge our Lord faced in the three satanic questions. Failing this test can lead to the sin of worshipping Satan and not trusting God.

The temptation passage in Matthew 4:1–11 has a contextual link with the phrase "and lead us not into temptation" in the Lord's Prayer. This link between 4:1 and 6:13 suggests the idea of temptation in 6:13 may have more to do with testing than it does primarily with a moral or ethical peccadillo. Jesus' wilderness temptation and the test in the Lord's Prayer largely concerned a trial.

The purpose of this article is to explore the meaning of the word *peirasmōs* in Matthew, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and James.

SHAPED BY TESTING

Without the trial in the desert, Calvary would have been a joke. Had Jesus made bread out of rocks during His temptation experience, He would have disqualified himself as Messiah. The wilderness experience was the divine will toughening, weighing, shaping, and tempering the messianic character of God's Son. Would redemption be wasted on Him or well served in His humble obedience? Would the gibbet be the useless end of just another martyr? Or, did the test in the wilderness strengthen His resolve and expose the gold vein in the mine shaft of redemption?

LED OF THE SPIRIT

God's Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness. Satan did not lead Him into the test; God did. The Spirit also leads you and me into suffering when illness, church struggles, domestic pain, and poverty face us. Sometimes we go kicking and screaming, but the Spirit leads, not into charismatic triumphalism, but into trials. Trials are necessary. This trial or test in the Judean desert proves the Lamb is without a spot or wrinkle of arrogance, selfish pride, and egomania.

TRUST AND OBEY

Will you use your powers for yourself? Will you use your gifts, talents, and abilities for selfish ends? Or, will you humbly obey? A spiritually weak and selfish pastor could never resist the "will to power" (to use Nietzsche's phrase).

Thank God Jesus said, "No." Jesus' trial focused on His complete trust and obedience to God's Word in the face of adversity. Would He satisfy His hunger and fail the testing (*peirasmōs*) of His faith? Satan tempted Jesus to disobey and misuse the power God had given Him as God's only begotten Son. This test became His temptation and the temptation His test. What is wrong with satisfying the hunger of the very Son of God? Yet, the Lord emerged victorious.

Having overcome the lust for power, He proved in this promethean struggle His complete obedience and trust in God's will that He was the "everlasting man," Isaiah's Lamb of God. The devil left howling like a lonely, slobbering dog in the wilderness. And the angels ministered to Jesus (Matthew 4:11). He finally got something eternally satisfying to eat and drink.

PEIRASMOS IN CONTEXT

In James 1:2, the meaning of *peirasmos* is the same as Matthew's. The primary sense of *peirasmos* in verse 2 is tribulation through suffering. James uses *peirasmois*, the plural form: "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials." Joy would be awkward if the trial was merely lurid or salacious.

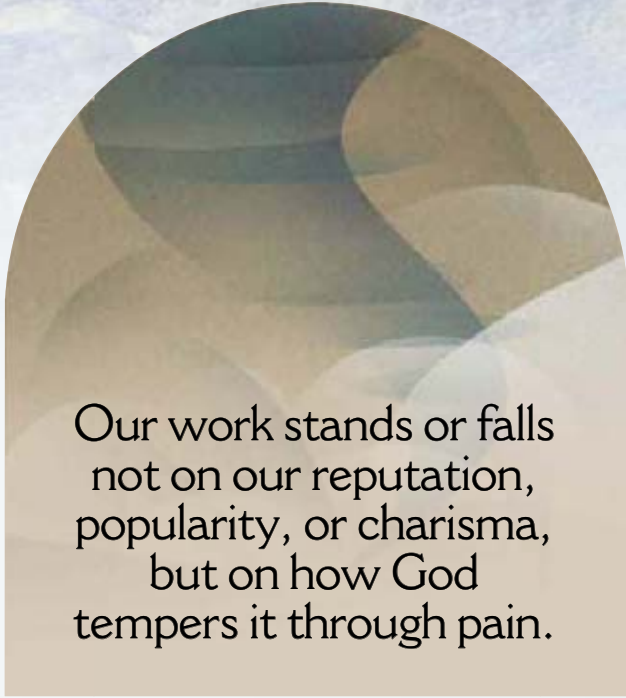
Luther, in his German text, translates *peirasmos* to generally mean "attack."² Attack, or an assault, is more like facing persecution, deep pain, suffering, or even death. Jerome's Vulgate veers away from the idea of a trial as suffering and translates *peirasmois* as *tentationes* or "temptations."³ In Spanish, *peirasmos* is sometimes translated *tentaciones* or temptations of a carnal nature.⁴ But the old Spanish translation of Casiodoro de Reina (1569), revised by De Valera in 1602, translates *peirasmois* as *pruebas* — trials, tests, or suffering. *Peirasmois* in James 1:2–4 seems to include the idea of character formation through suffering or persecution. The linguistic structure bears this out. The chain of discipleship formation in James 1:3,4 strongly argues for Luther and De Valera over Jerome, by seeing suffering as a spiritual attack.

IRON SHARPENS IRON

Steel must go through fire to remove its impurities and to be strengthened. The solid steel blade of a good Samurai sword or a good hunting knife has to go through the fire and then be shaped as the maker pounds it on an anvil. The knife maker heats and hammers the blade over and over until the steel becomes tempered. As steel must first go through fire, so must every believer.

The apostle Paul refers to the refining of precious metal in 1 Corinthians 3:13: "It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work." "The fire will test" is of special interest to our idea of *peirasmos*. Through suffering God tempers us for service. Tempering prepares and qualifies us for ministry. God's fires will test our work. Our work stands or falls not on our reputation, popularity, or charisma, but on how God tempers it through pain.

The word *dokimazo*, translated testing in James 1:3, also influences the word *peirasmos* in verse 2. This word brings out the flavor of a test, as suffering, in *peirasmos*. So the trials in verse 2 can mean persevering in the development of faith through pain (cf. verse 4: "Perseverance must finish its work."). Later in this chapter, James shifts the sense of *peirasmois* from sufferings



Our work stands or falls
not on our reputation,
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to resisting temptation to a moral failure (verses 13,14).

The doubt that can come from failing the testing of one's faith can lead to sin — the sin of not trusting God. James covers both meanings of *peirasmos*, the idea of faith tested by suffering (verses 2,3) and the idea of moral failure (especially in verses 12–14).

JOB'S TESTING

We see the testing we saw in Jesus also in Job. Job is the *textus classicus* for the test of faith in the face of terrible pain (Luther's "attack"). Satan, who tested Jesus in the wilderness, had also tested Job. Although their testings were different, Satan's goal was to overwhelm them, knock them out of ministry, stop them dead in their tracks from trusting in God, and essentially cause them to lose their faith. Job's test was prefaced by a disturbing discussion between God and the devil.

Job's wife blurted out waspishly in frustration, pain, and anger, "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Sometimes religious pain leads to atheism. You can hardly blame the woman: her children had died (1:19) and she was watching Job deteriorate into a puddle of pus (2:8). I could hear her hissing in the night, "Where is God in all of this?" Poor lady. She suffered, too.

But Job answered her, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (2:10).

ABRAHAM'S TEST

God tested Abraham as well (Genesis 22:1). What a test! Would he choose to trust God or would he disobey God's command to murder his son? This was not a reasonable request by a reasonable God. But God is never really reasonable by our standards. His trials always exceed our ability to understand. Faith is not a reasonable thing for that matter. Items of faith are never really as rational as systematic theologians try to make them.

The word for Abraham's trial is *nasah*, meaning to test, try,



prove, put to the test.⁵ It means to test the strength of someone's character by a severe trial. This is the refinement process James alludes to and Paul refers to in his metaphor of the purifying fires of heaven (1 Corinthians 3).

Peirasmos in the New Testament and *nasah* in the Old Testament carry the sense of a physical trial. Although *peirasmos* also carries the meaning of a temptation to moral failure, *nasah's* focus is on the gargantuan enormity of the painful decision before Abraham.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Peter also describes the process of *peirasmos* as a test in 1 Peter 4:12,13. This is the same word James uses in 1:2 where the character building process starts with faith tested, which produces perseverance; perseverance brings maturity; maturity brings wholeness or completion (James 1:2-4). Peter, too, reminds us that faith includes suffering.

James and Peter remind us that suffering through trials should not come as a surprise. Someone said, "Whenever we are allowed to suffer it comes as no surprise to God, who allows it." The suffering arrives for us with His approval.

TRIALS ARE FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE

Suffering is for special people. Only special people are tapped on the shoulder for that appointment. The write of Hebrews says: "Endure hardship ... God is treating you as sons. ... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:7,11). Ultimately, "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (verse 10). The trial then, is a sign of His eternal love for us, shaping us by it for an eternal rendezvous with His own glory.

In Hebrews 12, the idea of testing or discipline is a sign of His love (verse 6) meant to encourage us (verse 5) as part of His family as sons and daughters. In James 1:2, the test

should be a cause for joy because God is at work refining us. In 1 Peter 4:12,13, suffering is not surprising because it is part of faith. In each case, the Spirit of God is molding our character, refining us like pure gold, shaping us like a special son or daughter. Indeed, this is the case of God's shaping the only begotten Son in the wilderness. Suffering is a necessary common denominator of the Christian experience. There is no highway to heaven without the *Via Dolorosa*.

PEIRASMOS GETS PERSONAL

"Mrs. Canales," my surgeon said, "your husband has less than a 1 percent chance to live. Shall we stop working on him? He's not responding."

"We will take that 1 percent chance," my wife answered. Doctors had removed a large portion of my colon in the first surgery and tried to connect what was left. It did not work. My wife, who is a nurse, called my three sons together at the surgeon's request.

"Your father is dying. What is your wish?"

They prayed and agreed to trust God for a 1 percent miracle. From the septic shock my face and entire body swelled beyond recognition. Doctors put me on artificial life support.

"I did not take any pictures of you," Ritha said. "I don't want to remember you that way. I only want to remember God's healing power."

The code blue alarm sounded as they rushed me into surgery for the second time. The elevator was crowded with nurses and doctors. My district officials were in the waiting room holding my family up in prayer. The peace of God filled the place as they rushed me to surgery with hoses, IV tubes, and bags dangling from my body. I was hemorrhaging. The anesthesiologist straddled me with both knees, pumping air into my lungs. They shocked my heart 21 times, more than anyone in the history of the hospital.

They stopped the bleeding and removed the entire colon. I

Pontius' Puddle

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had an ileostomy bag attached for 15 months. Three months ago doctors reconnected my ileum. I am returning to normal, but not preaching four times on Sunday, just once.

This has been the worst trial of my life. I wish I could honestly say, like Job, that I did not deserve it. From all of this I only remember one thing after coming out of a 1-month coma. Somebody asked, “Did you see a light or anything?”

I did not see a light, but I do remember something: I was in a dark ballroom. An orchestra was playing a funeral dirge. My body was twitching to the music. The long, icy fingers of death himself dug deeply into my back through the opening in my hospital gown. The hooded deathly figure was making me dance to his tune while crushing the life out of me. With my final breath I whispered, “Jesus, Jesus, help me, Jesus.” The ballroom shadows shrank furtively from a radiant figure approaching the center of the ballroom floor. As He drew closer, He tapped death’s messenger on the shoulder, and I heard the Lord Jesus say, “This is My dance. I’m cutting in.” The angel of death released me on His command. And I’ve been dancing with Jesus ever since. 🌀

NOTES

1. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, ed., 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993); *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, eds., 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1979).
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THE SPIRIT *in* THE PREVAILING CHURCH:

“DELIVER US
FROM THE EVIL ONE”
(MATTHEW 6:13)

BY DICK BROGDEN

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article can be used to supplement sermon material when teaching and preaching on demon oppression and the influence of evil in the life of the believer. This article contains important principles on how members of your congregation can wake up to, cultivate, and welcome the manifest presence of God when confronting evil in their everyday lives.

Important
principles
on how God
delivers
His children
from evil
when they
reach out to
Him through
prayer.

INTRODUCTION

In Matthew 6:13, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, “**Deliver us from the evil one.**” In Matthew 4, Jesus encounters the evil one in the desert. In that encounter Jesus refers to Scripture as He answers Satan’s temptations. But there is also an implied dependence on who the Father is, and what only the Father can do. All three of Jesus’ responses are God centered. We, after all, cannot deliver ourselves from evil; we desperately need God’s help.

Evil is not restricted to any one place on earth. The devil and his minions wander purposely and with destructive intent in all nations and among all peoples. In some countries, such as the Sudan where I live with my family, the evil one acts quite brazenly; in other countries, he is more subtle. In all lands and at all times deliverance from evil’s sinister plans is a must. The following case study from Sudan suggests principles on how God delivers us from evil when we reach out to Him through prayer.

THE CURSE

Sudanese Muslims often curse each other by going to an Islamic witch doctor to ask him for an incantation from the *Koran*. One seals this Koranic verse in a small container, often a small tomato paste can, and buries it in the yard of the one on whom one wants evil to befall. A person might also throw this can on the roof or hide it somewhere in the victim’s possessions.

One day last year I found such a curse can in my car. I immediately became violently sick with malaria. A few days prior, a Sudanese believer who started dabbling in the occult had threatened me. I ignored his threats.

As the malaria became worse, my doctor put me in the hospital. I dislike hospitals, so I pleaded with the doctor



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to release me, figuring I might as well be miserable at home. I did not sleep; I did not eat; my bed was torturous; I rolled around on the tile floor looking for comfort. Worse than the physical pain was the spiritual darkness. I have had malaria before, but this time something sinister, something evil was adding to the sickness — something from the pit of hell. It felt as if demons were grabbing me by my shoulders and dragging me down into the abyss. I could not pray. I could hardly think — all was dark, terrifying, and life taking. Yes, the malaria was real and serious, but it was compounded by a direct spiritual attack.

I was at the end of myself. I prayed to die. One day I pulled myself up from the floor and struggled toward my bed. Barely able to talk, I simply mumbled through parched lips, "Help me, Jesus; help me, Jesus; help me, Jesus," and fell backward onto the bed.

And then Jesus walked into my room.

I could not see Him with my eyes, but I could feel Him with my spirit. The evil presence immediately lifted. I felt a quickening in my body. I felt an overwhelming sense of God's love. All I wanted to do was love Him back. Praise bubbled out of my mouth: "I love You, Jesus; I praise You, Jesus; I worship You, Jesus." Immediately on the heels of sensing Jesus loves me was a fierce desire to go tell my Muslim neighbor, Mohammed, that Jesus loves him too. I did not have the strength to stand, but if I could have, I would have rushed out the door, embraced Mohammed, and pleaded with him to accept the love of Jesus, the love that made my heart want to burst. At that moment I began to recover. Two days later I was completely whole. God delivered me from the evil one.

At almost the exact moment Jesus entered my room, the man who had threatened me walked out of the house he was building to smoke a cigarette. He was in his late 40s, strong as an ox, and with no medical issues. He collapsed and died. The coroner could find nothing wrong with him.

I learned several principles from this incident:

PRINCIPLE #1: GOD DELIVERS US FROM THE EVIL ONE BY MANIFESTING HIS PRESENCE.

Francis Frangipane in his book *The Three Battlegrounds*, reminds us, "The devil is absolutely terrified by the presence of Jesus." When Jesus manifests His presence, Satan has to flee. Our primary deliverance from the evil one is an increased awareness of the presence of Jesus. Technically, Jesus did not walk into my room for He was always there. Rather, He opened my understanding and sharpened my awareness. He tore the veil from my eyes, and oh, the joy that filled my soul. The manifest presence of Jesus delivered me from the evil one.

The question then, of course, is how to wake up to, cultivate, and welcome the manifest presence of God. In my case two

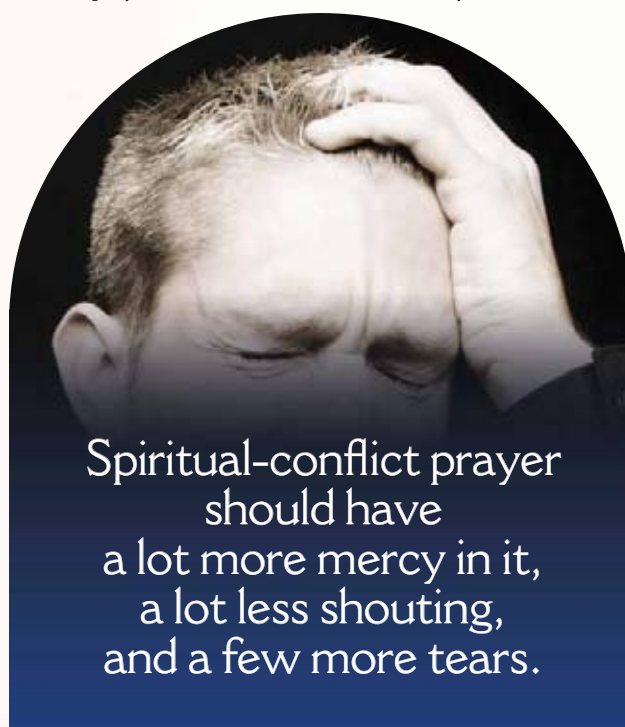
simple acts opened the way: 1) a whispered cry for help, and 2) verbal praise and exaltation of Jesus. When you are surrounded by evil, when evil forces impinge, when evil people attack, when evil ideas infiltrate your thinking, whisper up a prayer for help, then open your mouth and super-exalt Jesus. Start quietly if you must, but verbally extol and exalt Jesus as Christ, Lord, King, God of very God. Let your volume increase, and let the praises ring. For at the name of Jesus, every knee must bow. The devil is absolutely terrified of the manifest presence of Jesus.

PRINCIPLE #2: GOD DELIVERS US FROM THE EVIL ONE BY ALLOWING US TO PARTAKE IN THE DIVINE NATURE.

When I "awoke" to the presence of Jesus, an unfathomable sense of His love filled me. Inseparable from the love I felt from Him was an exploding love for my neighbor.

We pray so much of our spiritual-conflict prayer from a heart of anger, fear, judgment, even hypocrisy. Like James and John, we want to call fire down from heaven. Like David, we want God to bust a few teeth out of the evil ones who hurt us. We know that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, so we throw down our swords and wield prayer in a fleshly manner from unsettled spirits.

When we ask God to deliver us from evil, He does so by allowing us to conform to His character. Evil does not overcome evil; we overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). Spiritual-conflict prayer should have a lot more mercy in it, a lot less



Spiritual-conflict prayer
should have
a lot more mercy in it,
a lot less shouting,
and a few more tears.

shouting, and a few more tears.

When I was young my father and mother taught me to pray the Mercy Prayer. It is I believe the highest form of spiritual warfare praying, and it is praying from a broken and merciful heart.

"Lord, flood the one (or the situation) I am thinking about with fulfilling mercy.

Fill the one (or the context) that troubles me with Your overwhelming goodness.

Meet their every need, as You see it, and draw them close to Your heart. Amen."

Surprisingly, spiritual-conflict prayer will change our hearts more often than it changes external circumstances or even others. When we pray from a heart of mercy, God changes us — we take on God's central heart of mercy, and He delivers us from evil. He delivers us from the evil within our own hearts. Evil cannot touch our spirit and external realities become subject to the eternal, internal kingdom of God.

The next time evil — as manifested through a person (even a good person) — attacks you, pray the mercy prayer for him. It is a consistent way in which God delivers us from our own evil.

PRINCIPLE #3: GOD DELIVERS US FROM THE EVIL ONE EITHER BY EXTRACTION, ENDURANCE, OR ETERNITY.

DELIVERANCE BY EXTRACTION

The Bible is full of examples of deliverance by extraction. Sometimes God reaches down and pulls His dreamer out of prison (Joseph); His people out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus); His prophet out of the miry clay (Jeremiah); His apostle out of prison (Peter); or His church out of this world (Rapture). Through history, by faith, God's people have "subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life" (Hebrews 11:33–35, NKJV).¹

Our God is able to deliver us (Daniel 3:17). He can reach down and pull us out of evil. He can protect us from accidents. He can deliver us from perverted relationships. He can free us in a moment from an addiction. He can rescue us from a wrong decision. He can deliver us from tragedy through illumination. God can use us as His agents of deliverance. He can use us to extract young girls from the sex trade, a newborn from the dumpster, a teenager from hopelessness, and a friend from disaster.

When we can do nothing but from dry lips mutter, "Jesus, help me!" we have great assurance — because He has done it so often for so many — that God can reach down into our context, grab us by the back of the neck, and immediately deliver us from evil. God delivers us by extraction.



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DELIVERANCE BY ENDURANCE

"Our God ... is able to deliver us. ... But if not ..." (Daniel 3:17,18, NKJV). More often than not in Scripture, God delivers by endurance. God grants the grace to go through the evil: "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ... others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment" (Hebrews 11:35,36, NKJV). Paul endured stripes above measure, frequent imprisonment, near-death experiences, 39 stripes five times, three times beaten with rods, stoned one time, three shipwrecks, treading water for 24 hours in the deep, rough travel, perils of water, perils of robbers, perils of countrymen, perils of Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren, weariness, toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, and nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). He could blithely say to Timothy, "You have carefully followed my life closely, you know what persecutions I endured, *and out of them all the Lord delivered me*" (2 Timothy 3:10,11, author's paraphrase).

God delivers us by taking us through sickness. God delivers us by taking us through disastrous marriages. God delivers us by taking us through church splits. God delivers us by taking us through gossip, betrayal, rejection, depression, and loneliness. I was not healed of malaria as mentioned above. Medicine and time ran their course, but all the same I can say with Paul, "The Lord delivered me." It was not easy. It was brutal, and I never want to go through this again; but this does not negate the reality that God brought me through. God delivered me.

L.B. Cowman says it well in her May 13 devotional in *Streams in the Desert*: "Often it is simply the answers to our prayers that cause many of the difficulties of Christian life. We pray for

patience and our Father sends demanding people our way who test us to the limit, because ... *suffering produces perseverance* (Romans 5:3). We pray for a submissive spirit, and God sends suffering again, for we learn to be obedient in the same way Christ *'learned obedience by the things which he suffered'* (Hebrews 5:8, NKJV). We pray to be unselfish, and God gives us opportunities to sacrifice by placing other people's needs first and by laying down our lives for other believers. We pray for strength and humility, and a 'messenger of Satan' (2 Corinthians 12:7, NKJV) torments us until we lie on the ground pleading for it to be withdrawn."

Biblically, experientially, and statistically, deliverance by endurance is the most common way God delivers. He blesses us with His manifest presence. He conforms our heart, thinking, and perspective to His. He holds us close and simultaneously takes us through flood and fire. Paul concludes his deliverance lesson to Timothy by saying, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12, NKJV). God brings us through, and we are kinder, gentler, wiser, and stronger because of the rites of passage.

DELIVERANCE BY ETERNITY

There is an ultimate deliverance of God. It is the physical death of the believer and the realization of immortality. "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. ... of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:37,38, NKJV). Being temporally minded, it is difficult for us to embrace death as deliverance, but it is deliverance of the highest order. It is promotion to the undiluted, unrestrained, uninterrupted presence of Jesus forever and ever. It

is no more night, no more pain, no more tears, never crying again (Revelation 21:4).

In 1 Kings 14, Jeroboam splits the nation of Israel and leads them into idolatry. Jeroboam's son, Abijah, becomes deathly sick, and Jeroboam sends his wife to the prophet Ahijah to know what will become of the child. Ahijah says, "The child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God" (1 Kings 14:12,13, NKJV).

Abijah, contrary to the hope and request of all who love him, is taken home to Paradise, because he is the good guy. Sometimes good guys die. Sometimes deliverance comes by death. Sometimes the Jim Elliots, Keith Greens, and John Yorks (revered Assemblies of God missionary to Africa who died from leukemia at the peak of his missionary service) of the world die sooner than makes sense to us. Sometimes young children are run over, sometimes accidents take loved ones, sometimes the innocent are orphaned, and for all those who passed away that love the Lord, it was their ultimate deliverance. It is difficult for us who remain behind, of course, but one day — either by trumpet or our own death — we too will share in that deliverance supreme.

We do not hastily pray for God to take His loved ones home, but when He chooses to do so we recognize for them it is the end of all evil and the beginning of eternal joy.

CONCLUSION

Eradication of evil is different from extraction. In extraction God takes us out of the evil, and in eradication, He destroys evil. Because eradication of evil is so rare — evil spirits return to the swept house on account of our flesh, and the yet uncaged devil — it is better to leave the conclusion as is, pointing simply to the Blessed Hope and the final removal of evil.

When that glad day comes, all creation will be eternally free of the evil one and all his influence. Until that great and glorious day, let us depend on the manifest presence of Jesus, let us partake of the divine nature by responding to evil with mercy, and let us accept from the sovereign hand of God extraction, endurance, or eternity as He ordains. ☺

NOTE

1. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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"You're being pressed, molded, and shaped for ministry, Harold. But I'm sure not every board meeting will end this way."



DICK BROGDEN is a missionary in Northern Africa.




TEACH US
TO PRAY

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE ESSENCE OF JESUS'
MODEL PRAYER IN THE CONTEXT
OF FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM

BY MARC TURNAGE



Modern readers who understand the Lord's Prayer within its linguistic and cultural context gain a new, profound understanding of Jesus, His faith, and what He expects of His followers.

Jesus' world shaped Him and defined Him. He was a first-century Jew¹, and as such, His message and faith grew out of the soil of first-century Judaism. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), He did so within the contemporary context of Jewish prayer, communicating through this prayer His view of God and humanity. Although Christians have prayed “The Lord's Prayer” since the beginning of the Church², few have sought to place the prayer within the cultural, historical, and linguistic context of Jesus and first-century Judaism. Among the various voices of Christian interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, we often overlook the voice of Jesus of Nazareth.

Understanding the complexities of Jesus' simple words is not about spiritual insight or revealed wisdom. Rather, by listening to it in its linguistic and cultural context, we gain greater insight into the faith of Jesus, His view of God, and how He taught us to approach God.

The goal of this essay is to serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus, and allow the reader to sit at the feet of Jesus and let Him teach us, gaining insight into the original utility and profound theology of the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps by entering into His world and hearing His voice, we can allow Him to enter ours and better communicate His message today.

PRAYER IN ANCIENT JUDAISM

After the return of the Jewish people from Babylonian captivity (sixth century B.C.), public liturgies, which included prayer and a reading from the Torah, became more prominent and served to deepen the religious feelings of the Jewish people. In response

to the growing religious importance of Torah reading and prayer during the Second Temple Period, the Jewish people established the synagogue.³ Although we do not know their precise origins, synagogues existed within Jewish communities by the third-century B.C.

The diverse Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman Period (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic literature) indicate that fixed prayers became an important part of the religious expressions of Jewish communities and individuals. With the rise of fixed prayers, the sages repeatedly warned against prayer becoming a "fixed" practice. The sages did not want liturgies to reduce prayer to something mechanical and perfunctory, devoid of inward devotion. To this end, the sages repeatedly emphasized the intention of the heart in public or private prayer (see Luke 18:9–14).

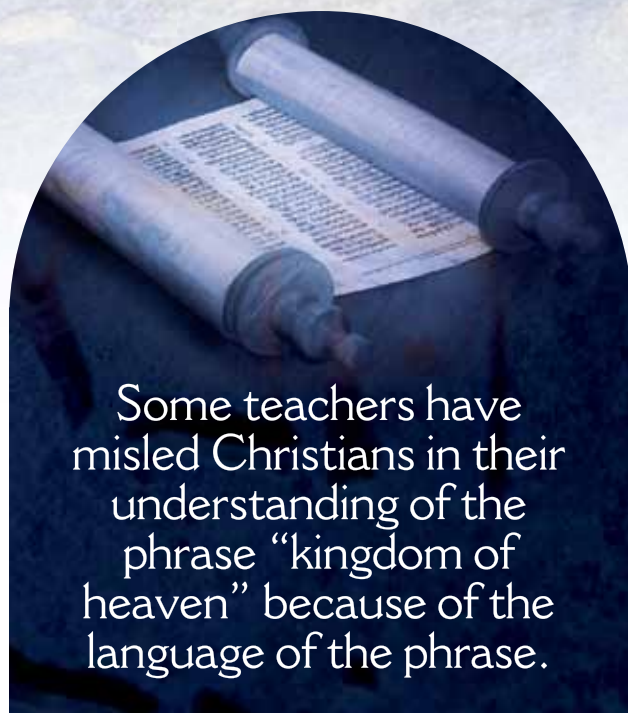
The most prominent of the fixed prayers that began during the Greco-Roman Period, still prayed among Jewish communities today,⁴ is the *Shemoneh Esreh* ("the Eighteen [benedictions]"), which refers to the number of benedictions within this prayer.⁵ This prayer was in its present form by A.D. 90–100, with many of its portions dating to the first and second centuries B.C. According to Rabban Gamaliel (c. A.D. 90–100), "One must say the Eighteen [benedictions] every day."⁶ The sages recognized, however, that life situations did not always permit praying the full "Eighteen Benedictions," so they offered abbreviated prayers that people could pray and fulfill their obligation.

Rabbi Eliezer, a young contemporary of Jesus, provided an abbreviated prayer that can fulfill one's obligation to recite the 'Amidah: "May Your will be done in the heavens above, and grant peace of mind to those who fear You below, and do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed are You, O Lord, who answers prayer."⁷ The similarity between this prayer and the prayer Jesus taught His disciples is quite apparent. This similarity, along with others discussed below — and the widespread tendency of sages to offer abbreviated prayers to their disciples that fulfilled the obligation of praying the 'Amidah — indicate that in the Lord's Prayer Jesus provided His disciples with His own abbreviated prayer of the great Jewish prayer, a prayer He and His disciples knew well.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

The Lord's Prayer begins "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9),⁸ a common form of reference to God in ancient Jewish prayers. Within the Old Testament, prophets and poets repeatedly used the imagery of father to refer to God.⁹ By identifying God as "Father," the biblical authors recall the fact we are God's creation, and as His children, we have a responsibility to obey Him and follow His ways (Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 1:6).

Jesus used the phrase "Our Father" to identify



Some teachers have misled Christians in their understanding of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" because of the language of the phrase.

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God's fatherhood of every human, whether righteous or not: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be *sons of your Father who is in heaven*. [italics added] For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44,45, ESV).¹⁰

According to Jesus, no one person or group has exclusive rights to God; everyone is His child. Jesus' worldview follows that of the sages. According to Jesus and the sages, God, like a good father, takes care of His children even when they do not deserve it (Matthew 6:25–34; 7:7–11; Luke 11:9–13; 12:22–32). Yet, He will also discipline them within His love and mercy (Proverbs 3:11,12; Hebrews 12:5–11).

MAY YOUR NAME BE SANCTIFIED

After the invocation, "Our Father in heaven," Jesus introduces the first benediction of the prayer, "hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9, KJV). The common rendering of the first benediction of the Lord's Prayer fails to capture the meaning of the phrase as Jesus intended it. This was not a statement of praise and exaltation; rather, the Hebrew phrase behind the Greek of the Gospels is best rendered "may Your name be sanctified."

In the Old Testament, we encounter the idea of sanctifying the name of God in Isaiah 6:3. The prophet Ezekiel also declared, "I [God] will show my greatness and my holiness (lit. I will make myself great and sanctify myself), and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:23). The Hebrew phrase "I will sanctify myself" parallels Jesus' benediction "may Your name be sanctified."

According to Ezekiel, God sanctifies His name by His actions. Both the Old Testament and ancient Jewish literature indicate that God's people sanctify His name by the way



they act. Whenever people obey His commandments they sanctify God's name. The opposite of sanctifying God's name by our obedience is to profane His name through disobedience (Numbers 20:12).

Later Jewish sages forbade any unethical economic dealings with Gentiles lest "the name of Heaven be profaned among the nations" because His children invoked the name of God in their actions. Likewise, Paul in Romans 2:21–24 called on Jews in Rome to live holy lives in the midst of the Gentiles lest the name of the Lord be profaned among the Gentiles as in Ezekiel 36:23. God's name is sanctified either by how He acts or how we act; consequently, we profane His name in our disobedience, especially in how we relate to others.

Jewish suffering in the years leading up to the time of Jesus and in the years afterward occurred largely because of Jewish commitment to obey God's commandments. As a result, the phrase "the sanctification of the Name" became a euphemism for martyrdom — dying because of their devotion to the commands of God.

Previously we suggested that the Lord's Prayer was an abbreviated prayer Jesus taught — like other Jewish sages — that fulfilled one's obligation of praying the 'Amidah. The third benediction of the 'Amidah, known as the *Kedushah* (sanctification), parallels the first benedictions of the Lord's Prayer: "May we sanctify Your name in this world as it is sanctified in the highest of heaven" — "May Your name be sanctified. ... May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." As we will see, the first three benedictions of the Lord's Prayer — "May Your name be sanctified," "May Your kingdom come," and "May Your will be done" — are poetically parallel and variations of the same thing. Jesus began His prayer with the benediction asking God that His name would be sanctified by the way in which His disciples obey Him perfectly in this world as the heavenly hosts do in the highest of heavens, for wherever God's will is done His name is sanctified.

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME

Jesus used the phrase "kingdom of heaven" more than any other within the Gospels yet, historically, it is probably one of the most misunderstood ideas within Christendom. Traditionally, theologians and scholars have defined the phrase "kingdom of heaven" as either, 1) pertaining to something eschatological (i.e., the end of the age) and/or apocalyptic, or, 2) Jesus' desire to establish a messianic kingdom on earth, a hope dashed by the tragedy of the Cross.

The expression "kingdom of heaven" only appears outside the Gospels within rabbinic literature; it does not appear in any other Jewish literature, including the literature interested in apocalyptic or eschatological themes.¹¹ Some teachers have misled Christians in their understanding of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" because of the language of the phrase. First,

"heaven" does not refer to a location. Rather, during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (third century B.C.–third century A.D.), Jews avoided articulating the name of God or the Divine Name. They spoke about God using circumlocutions, e.g., the glory, the omnipresent, the place, heaven. Thus, the "kingdom of heaven" is no different from the "kingdom of God" (as the phrase appears in Luke's Gospel).

Second, "kingdom" in English denotes a physical place. In Hebrew, however, the word for "kingdom" (מְלָכָה) is a verbal noun and is better translated as "reign" or "rule," thus, the "rule (reign) of God." In the Lord's Prayer, the phrase "May Your kingdom come" could suggest a future realization of the "coming" of God's reign, but the Hebrew phrase behind the Greek of the Gospels suggests the notion of "making one king" or "establishing one as king." In this way, Jesus' benediction parallels the Jewish prayer, the *Kaddish*: "May He cause His kingdom (rule) to reign."¹² The phrase "May Your kingdom come" would be better paraphrased as "May You continue establishing Your reign."

Among the sages, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" anticipated a future time when God would reveal His rule to all the inhabitants of the world. At this time, God would remove the yoke of foreign domination from Israel. Some also anticipated that the revelation of the "kingdom of heaven" would signal the defeat of Satan and his powers.¹³ At present, those obeying God's commands acknowledge His right to rule over them and thus realize the "kingdom of heaven."

The sages connected the realization of the kingdom of heaven in this world with Israel's obedience to God. In fact, they attributed Israel's subjection to foreign rulers as a result of disobedience: "If the house of Israel transgresses the Law, foreign nations will rule over her, and if they keep the Law, mourning, tribulation, and lamentation will depart from her."¹⁴ Consequently, within rabbinic circles, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" developed as an anti-Zealot slogan in opposition to the Zealots who demanded the sole rule of God. The Zealots fought against Rome and those allied with her believing that by using Rome's tactics of violence against her they could establish God's rule on the earth (Luke 22:24–27).

In contrast to the violence advocated by the Zealots, the sages taught that the realization of God's rule on the earth would come whenever His people obeyed His commands. For both Jesus and the sages, the kingdom of heaven is present and future.

While God's reign will be visibly revealed in the future, His reign is revealed presently in the obedience of His people. Jesus, however, uniquely understood His movement as inaugurating a historical point-in-time in which the Kingdom was "breaking forth" (Matthew 11:12; Luke 17:20,21), and we identify those living presently in the kingdom of heaven by their obedience to the commands of God (Matthew 5:20).

Within the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' instruction of His disciples

to pray, "May You continue establishing Your reign (i.e., through our obedience)," parallels the opening benediction, "May Your name be sanctified," because we sanctify God's name and establish His reign through our obedience. So, too, it parallels the following benediction, "May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Thus, at the outset of Jesus' model prayer, He teaches His disciples to pray: "May Your name be sanctified, and may Your reign be established through our obedience and submission to Your will and commandments."

MAY YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

In the *'Amidah*, the third benediction, the *Kedushah* ("sanctification"), reads: "We sanctify Your name *in this world* as it is sanctified *in the highest heavens*" (emphasis added). Jesus said, "May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Among the various streams of Jewish piety in the first century, the term "will" (וּלְצַדִּיק),¹⁵ as it pertains to the "will of God," was an important and distinguishing theological concept. According to the first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, questions regarding divine providence, or the will of God, distinguished the three principal Jewish parties (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes). Josephus says regarding the Pharisees, "They say that certain events are the work of Fate (i.e., Providence), but not all; as to other events, it depends upon ourselves whether they shall take place or not,"¹⁶ specifically in matters of righteous and wicked behavior.¹⁷ Within Pharisaic circles, doing the will of God was equivalent to obeying the commandments.

In contrast to the Pharisees, the Essenes believed everything was predetermined by the will of God. According to Josephus, "The sect of Essenes, however, declares that Fate is the mistress of all things, and that nothing befalls men unless it is in accordance with her decree."¹⁸ For the Essenes, the will of God determined everything within the world, even identifying the righteous and the wicked. The Essenes' predeterminism led them to isolate themselves from the rest of society and develop sectarian ideas and practices. The strict predeterminism of the Essenes does not appear in the teachings of Jesus; moreover, an Essene would not have prayed, "May Your will be done in earth and in heaven."

The sages frequently connected Israel's hopes for redemption with their obedience to the commandments of God (i.e., His will). Jesus also associated people's obedience to God's will, through repentance, with entry into the kingdom of heaven, and the redemptive hopes of Israel (Luke 4:16–30; Matthew 4:17; cf. Isaiah 58:6–9; 61:1,2). Jesus taught His disciples that, through their obedience to God, His will is done on earth as it is by the angels of heaven. By submitting to God's rule, we establish His reign on earth. Jesus' prayer asks God to sanctify His name, establish His rule, and make

His will done by the obedient submission of Jesus' followers. Like His Jewish contemporaries, Jesus viewed such obedience as preparatory for redemption.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer reads, "Give us (literally: be giving us continually) each day our daily bread" (1:3). Matthew's "Give us today our daily bread" (6:11) better preserves the Hebraic idiom of Jesus' entreaty, as well as Jesus' radical conviction that each day contains its own blessing (Matthew 6:24–34; Luke 12:22–31).

Jesus drew the radical conclusion that to seek one's provision beyond the day expressed anxiety and worry, which, for Jesus, marks one as being "of little faith" (Matthew 6:30–32). In this, Jesus belonged to a stream of Jewish thought that viewed each day as possessing its own sanctity and as such one should praise God for the present day (Matthew 6:34).

In part, the genesis of this worldview derived from the episode of the miracle of manna ("daily bread") in the wilderness where God commanded the Israelites to "gather enough for that day" (Exodus 16:4–10). By requiring the people to daily rely on God for their sustenance, He tested them to ascertain if they would "follow my instruction or not" (Exodus 16:4; cf. also Deuteronomy 8:2–4; Luke 4:4).

Jesus identified those anxious about tomorrow as being "of little faith." The source of this daily confidence and outlook lay not in the power of positive thinking, but in an unrelenting trust in God, who creates the day and sustains all life.

Jesus' instruction to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," fits within His attitude regarding anxiety and worry: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat,' or 'What shall we drink,' or 'What shall we wear?' For ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ... Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Matthew 6:31–34, RSV; see Luke 12:22–31). At the conclusion of His statement about worry, Jesus said, "Instead, seek his kingdom,¹⁹ and these things²⁰ shall be yours as well" (Luke 12:31, RSV; cf. Matthew 6:33).²¹

Jesus enjoined people to focus on the true source of their sustenance — our Father in heaven. Jesus, like His Jewish contemporaries, expressed that only the one who truly trusts God for the provision of the day can appropriately study the divine commands. By making obedience to the will of God the primary goal of one's life, a person does not need to be anxious about the cares of life, for one who worries about the cares of life misunderstands the character of God, our Father.

FORGIVE US ... AS WE HAVE FORGIVEN

In the centuries leading up to the first century, Judaism underwent a transformation that produced a new religious sensitivity

whereby people were to serve God with unconditional love, without any thought of reward.²² This new religious sensitivity crystallized around the two biblical passages, “you shall love the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:5) and “you shall love your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:18; cf. Luke 10:27). People viewed the oath at the conclusion of Leviticus 19:18²³ as enforcing the divine command to “love your neighbor.” In keeping with such an interpretation of Leviticus 19:18, the verse became interpreted, “Love your neighbor *who is like yourself*.” Equally important to the development of this new sensitivity was Genesis 1:27: “God created man in his own image.” Because every human bears the image of God, he or she has immediate value.

In circles where this new sensitivity developed, loving one’s neighbor became a precondition for reconciliation with God. This same sentiment lies behind Jesus’ statement, “Blessed are the merciful (i.e., those who show mercy), for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). A sage living shortly after Jesus observed, “Transgressions between a man and his neighbor are not expiated by the Day of Atonement unless the man first makes peace with his neighbor.”²⁴ In like manner, at the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructed His disciples, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14,15).

Jesus enjoined His disciples to pray, “Forgive us ... as we

have forgiven.” In other words, our forgiveness from God depends on the forgiveness we show to others. This new sensitivity stands at the heart of Jesus’ message and teachings. This development within Judaism enabled Him to draw His radical conclusion — not echoed among His Jewish contemporaries or His later followers — that we should even love our enemies, those who hate us (Matthew 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–36).

Jesus commanded His disciples, “There must be no limit in your goodness, as your heavenly Father’s goodness knows no bounds” (Matthew 5:48, NEB).²⁵ If you love your neighbor, who like you is created in God’s image, God will show you mercy, but if you hate your neighbor, who like you is created in God’s image, God will punish you (Matthew 25:34–46). Jesus taught, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:37,38).²⁶


Within Jesus’ thought, like His Jewish contemporaries, our relationship with God and His forgiveness of us depends on our relationships with others and the mercy we show to them (1 John 1:9,10). For Jesus, this was no sentimental teaching, but the very essence of His message (Luke 4:16–30).

AND DO NOT BRING US INTO THE GRASP OF TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Jewish prayers, like Jewish poetry, made frequent use of parallelism where one statement reinforces another. In the Lord’s Prayer, the phrases “May Your name be sanctified,” “May Your kingdom come,” and “May Your will be done” are parallelisms where each statement reinforces the other. Jesus also used parallelism in the phrases “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (KJV).

The English translation “Lead us not into temptation” is too harsh a translation of the Greek given the Hebrew sense of the phrase. A better translation would be “And do not bring us into the grasp of temptation,” a common sentiment in contemporary Jewish prayers.

Some modern New Testament translations have translated the second phrase “but deliver us from the evil one,” instead of “but deliver us from evil.” While it is possible to translate the Greek either way, in Hebrew one would not say “evil one” in reference to Satan. Rather, if Jesus had intended His disciples to ask for deliverance from Satan, He would have used the term “Satan,” a request made in some contemporary Jewish prayers. Moreover, the parallelism of these phrases indicates that the correct translation should be “deliver us from evil,” which restates the request “do not bring us into the grasp of temptation.”



The Lord’s Prayer grew out of the soil of Jewish religious experience and piety in the first century.

Jesus believed people are tempted because evil inclination rules over them. If God will deliver us from the rule of the evil inclination, then He will deliver us from evil, which causes temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). The plea for deliverance Jesus placed into His model prayer further acknowledges God's right to reign and our submission to His reign. By recognizing our tendency to be led into temptation, yet at the same time our desire to submit to God's rule and commandments, Jesus instructs His followers to look to God as their deliverer from the grasp of temptation and evil.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The best Greek manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel do not include the doxology — "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (KJV) — indicating most likely it was not part of the original prayer Jesus taught His disciples. The genesis for this doxology most likely came from the use of the Lord's Prayer within early Christian worship and liturgy, where it was prayed three times a day.²⁸

The Lord's Prayer grew out of the soil of Jewish religious experience and piety in the first century. It anchors Jesus within the religious life of first-century Judaism, particularly the

stream of piety exhibited by the sages. At the same time, the Lord's Prayer provides a window through which His disciples gained a vivid understanding of His faith, view of God, our relationship to Him, and the interrelationship between us, others, and God. Modern readers who understand this prayer within its linguistic and cultural context gain a new, profound understanding of Jesus, His faith, and what He expected of His disciples. We feel like the layers of the centuries have been removed, and once again we, too, can sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from the Master. 🌟

NOTES

1. Within recent decades, it has become quite popular to speak about the "Jewishness of Jesus" within Christian and New Testament circles. Such trendiness removes the study of Jesus of Nazareth away from historical and linguistic disciplines that are so vital to contextualizing and understanding His words. In fact, the modern trend to "rediscover the Jewishness of Jesus" or "the Jewish roots of Christianity" has produced a portrait of Jesus quite foreign to Jesus of Nazareth and first-century Judaism. The purpose of this article is to engage the Jesus of the Gospels and provide a window into His theology and worldview in the prayer He instructed His disciples to pray.
2. Cf. Didache 8:2,3.
3. Acts 15:21. Cf. also Philo, *De vita Mosi* II, 215,16; *De opificio mundi*, 128; and Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:175.
4. This prayer forms the heart of the morning, afternoon, and evening weekday services in the synagogue.

5. This prayer is also referred to as the *Amidah* ("standing"), since it is recited while standing, or simply as *Tefilah* ("prayer"), the most common way to refer to this prayer in the early literature.
6. *M. Berachot* 4:3.
7. *T. Berachot* 3:7.
8. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2–4) begins "Father" omitting the phrase "who is in heaven." Luke probably did this out of sensitivity for his Greek readers, who would most likely associate the "father in heaven" with Zeus of Greek mythology. For some time, the pagan world had not believed in Zeus who resided in heaven; thus, Luke omitted "who is in heaven" and also the phrase "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," since they could be misunderstood in a non-Jewish context.
9. Jeremiah 31:9; Psalm 68:5; 103:13; "our Father," Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; 1 Chronicles 29:10; and "my Father," Jeremiah 3:4; 3:19; Psalm 89:26.
10. Matthew 5:44,45; cf. b. *Ta'anit* 7b. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
11. Within nonrabbinic Jewish literature, certain aspects of the concept of the kingdom of heaven appear, but the phrase grew out of rabbinic circles.
12. Cf. also the Eleventh Benediction of the *Amidah*: "And rule over us, You alone."
13. Cf. *Testament of Moses* 10:1–10; *Testament of Daniel* 6:1–5; and Luke 10:17–20.
14. *Targum* on Ezekiel 2:10.
15. נֶזֶק also means favor (cf. Isa. 61:2).
16. *Antiquities* 13:172.
17. "Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given" (m. *Avot* 3:19).
18. *Antiquities* 13:172.
19. That is His rule, which is established by obedience to His will.
20. The cares of life, i.e., clothes, food, and shelter. Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National

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21. Luke 12:31; cf. Matthew 6:33.
22. *M. Avot* 1:3; cf. D. Flusser, "A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message," in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 469–489.
23. "Love your neighbor as yourself — I — *the Lord*" (emphasis added).
24. *M. Yoma* 8:9; cf. Matthew 5:23,24.
25. The New English Bible. New Testament, 1961. C.H. Dodd, ed., The New English Bible. New Testament. Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1961. Bible, 1970. C.H. Dodd, ed., The New English Bible with the Apocrypha. Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970.
26. Luke 6:37,38. A saying recorded by Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 96) attributed to the Lord parallels Luke 6:37,38: "Be merciful, and you will find mercy; forgive, and you will be forgiven; as you do, so it will be done to you; as you give, so it will be given to you; as you judge, so you will be judged; as you do good, so will good be done to you; with the same measure in which you give, it will be given to you" (1 Clement 13:2).
27. Cf. b. *Berachot* 17a; and Romans 7:7–25.
28. Cf. *Didache* 8:2,3.



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OFF *the* SCRIPT:

PRAYER IN THE SPIRIT AND THE GIFT OF TONGUES

BY JOSEPH L. CASTLEBERRY

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following essay can be used to supplement sermon material when teaching and preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Nobody lives in the real world.
“You’ll never amount to anything,”
his father yelled. “You don’t
sing as well as your sister
does,” her mother insulted.
“You’re dumber than dirt.”
“You’re just like your
father.” “You’ll never
be able to pay
for college.”
“If you don’t
do it the
way
we

LIFE’S
SCRIPT

always have, it can't be done." "People [of your race, ethnicity, personality type] can't make it." "Christians are weird." "Only weak people believe in God."

Lies, lies, lies.

The Bible says, "Let God be true, and every human being a liar" (Romans 3:4, TNIV).¹ So how do we get past human lies to find God's truth? The answer: It is a lifelong quest. While God designed us to be learners, many people, as the Bible says, are "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7, TNIV). Because
no one has perfect knowledge
of God's truth,
nobody

lives completely in the real world.

Of course, there is a sense in which we all live in the real world, in as much as our bodies inhabit the real physical world. But while we exist inside our bodies — we live inside our heads — we filter everything we experience through the basic beliefs we have about the world. Our "programming" determines how we understand the world; and, once we get certain ideas fixed in our heads, it can make living on God's beautiful earth seem like a trek through hell. While some people see the world as an awe-inspiring place full of opportunity, others live as if it were a prison with no door.

Undoubtedly, some people see the world more clearly than others. But all of us live inside a mental world that other people pass on to us. Our parents, teachers, friends, and enemies, the media, government, the religion we grew up in — are constantly telling us what the world is, what life is, who we are, and what we can do. All of them interpret the world within the constant human struggle for power.

LIFE'S SCRIPT

Recent philosophy places a lot of focus on the way people try to control others by imposing an interpretation of the world on them. Some philosophers call these interpretations *power discourses*. I call them *the script*.

One of the most famous philosophers of the 20th century, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote a play called *No Exit*. There are



only three characters in the play, which is set in hell. Throughout the dialogue, the three characters try to manipulate each other to get their way, although the nature of the three makes it impossible for any of them to get what they want. In the end, one of the actors declares, "Hell is other people."² Sartre had become hopelessly weary of the way people were constantly trying to impose their will on others.

Like actors on a stage who recite the lines they have learned, people tend to act out the lives society has scripted for them. Very few people lead innovative lives of intrepid creativity. Whom do you know who has really broken the mold and lived a life that was truly original, deeply fulfilling, and totally surprising to everyone who knew them? Unfortunately, very few people. Only one person in human history has ever really lived out His own original script, and we call Him *the Truth*. Most people simply obediently live out the life scripted for them by others, saying what they are supposed to say, doing what they are supposed to do, trying to make other people happy, yearning for something better.

DEFEATING THE SCRIPT

There is a way to defeat the script. It is called speaking in tongues, an ancient spiritual practice mentioned prominently in the New Testament and practiced by many hundreds of millions of people around the world today. Unfortunately, some people who have never spoken in tongues have historically attacked those who do as being *weird*. But a recent nationwide study by the Pew Research Center suggests that some 23 percent of Americans have spoken in tongues. When a quarter of the population has done something, it can hardly be said to be *weird*. As a matter of fact, that fits more closely with the definition of *normal*.

Still, *weird* isn't the worst thing that has been said about praying in tongues. In the early 1900s when there was a remarkable resurgence in the number of people who spoke in tongues, many people who did not want others to speak in tongues began to teach that speaking in tongues is demonic. There is not a single word in Scripture that suggests that tongues is demonic, weird, or anything less than a beautiful gift from God. But many people who consider themselves Bible-believing Christians have believed what others told them instead of believing what the Bible itself says about the gift of tongues.

So what does the Bible say about speaking in tongues? In short, a couple of passages go right to the heart of the matter. Paul writes that "those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:2, TNIV). He then adds: "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (14:14, TNIV). So, according to the Bible, when people pray in tongues, they are praying directly to God.



When we pray in tongues,
the Holy Spirit guides our
spirits to pray according to
the will of God.

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They do not consciously know what they are saying, but their spirit within them is nevertheless calling out to God, speaking mysteries that the mind does not understand. In another place, Paul writes, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26,27).

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). In many cases, when we ask for God's will to be done, we are praying blind, because we simply do not know what God's will is. In many situations, our own inadequate understanding of our problems and those of others leads us to pray directly against the will of God, without our being aware of it. This puts us in a place of significant weakness. But God helps us.

PRAYING GOD'S WILL

When we pray in tongues, the Holy Spirit guides our spirits to pray according to the will of God. We speak out mysteries that, in our rational minds, we cannot understand. This is the beauty of praying in tongues. It is the most liberating form of prayer that exists, as it sets us free from the script everyone else has tried to write for us. We are even set free from the script we would try to write for God based on our limited, sin-colored perspectives.

RECEIVING GOD'S POWER

Jesus promised His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). He made that promise after they asked Him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). Jesus knew exactly what they were asking. In His previous conversations with them, He told them they would sit on 12 thrones judging the tribes of Israel. They had gone through a dream-crushing trial as Jesus was brutally crucified. But after His powerful resurrection, they were ready to take authority over others and help Jesus rule.

Jesus' answer went straight to the heart of their ambitions: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (1:7,8). In other words, forget about having authority over others. The Father will hold on to His authority; that's not your part to play. But you *will* receive power. It will not be power over people, but power within yourselves to serve God, to be a witness to others of God's saving power, and to participate in the triumph of God throughout the whole world.

The disciples did indeed receive the Holy Spirit and power. Along with that power, they received the gift of tongues: "Suddenly ... they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (2:2,4).

Every Christian receives the Holy Spirit at the moment he or she is born again. The disciples of Jesus experienced God's salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their lives. But on the Day of Pentecost, they received the fullness of power that comes to believers the first time they completely open their lives to the Holy Spirit. With the power came the gift of tongues and a freedom they had never known.

That same gift of tongues is available to every Christian today. The Holy Spirit desires to fill us to overflowing and, in that overflow, the gift of tongues breaks forth in freedom. No longer are we limited in our prayers by lies and confusion and the partial truths we have been told all our lives. We are free to pray, by the Spirit's direction, according to the will of God.

And not only are we set free, but we also set God free to do as He wants to do in our lives. No longer are we merely presenting our list of requests and instructions (and often, complaints and accusations) to God. We are declaring the mysteries of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, calling out specifically with our own lips for God to perform His perfect will.

BUILDING UP OUR SPIRIT

According to Paul, praying that way builds us up in our spirit: "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Corinthians 14:4). As we pray in tongues, our spirit grows, it gathers strength, and sometimes what we know in our spirit finds its way into our conscious mind. The famous Russian physicist and philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, wrote that "we know more than we can tell."³ In his classic book, *The Tacit Dimension*, he explains that most great scientific discoveries in history were known to the scientists in their subconscious mind before they were able to articulate them in rational language. As a matter of fact, such scientific discoveries tend to come to scientists in dreams or at times of play or relaxation, rather than during moments of intense observation and analysis.

Praying in the Spirit through the gift of tongues is one of



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HOW TO BEGIN PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

Enter into God's presence with faith and sincerity. If singing makes you feel closer to God, listen to music and enter His presence with singing. Worship the Lord and declare His goodness. When you are ready, offer this simple prayer: "Heavenly Father, I am Your child. You have caused me to be born again by Your Spirit through faith in Your Son. By that same faith, I come to You now to receive Your promise. It is for me, because it is for everyone who believes. So I receive the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues. Thank You, Father, for Your good promise."

As you pray, you will feel God's presence. As soon as you feel God there with you, begin to speak in tongues. His presence means He is there to keep His promise. He will not disappoint you. Boldly begin to speak in tongues as God enables you. Do not be afraid to say something you do not understand. That is what the gift of tongues is. Boldly speak out in faith. Offer to God words that you do not understand. At the same time, the Spirit will enable you to speak in tongues. It's that simple. You do not have to understand it and, in fact, you will not understand. Just speak out in faith and receive a blessing that is going to last for the rest of your life. After you have received, spend time praying in the Spirit whenever you pray.

— JOSEPH L. CASTLEBERRY

the ways God speaks to us, long before our minds can understand the details of God's will. It is the most sublime form of prayer, subliminal in its nature, but reaching beyond us, straight to the throne of God. Often, things we have learned deep in our spirits during prayer in the Spirit surface in our conscious minds, usually at just the right moment when we really need empowered insight.

RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT

You need and can receive this precious gift right now. The first step toward receiving the gift of tongues is to believe in it. At this moment, you have every reason to believe that God wants to fill you with the Holy Spirit and power. Jesus referred to the gift of the Spirit as "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4, KJV).

If you are a child of God, you have every reason to expect that the Father will keep His promise to you. When Peter stood to explain to the huge crowd that had gathered why the disciples were speaking in tongues, he put it as clearly as it can be said: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). If you have put your faith in Christ, you are absolutely eligible to receive the promise of the Father, just like the disciples at Pentecost did.

You will receive the gift of tongues the same way the believers did on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:4 says, “[They] began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Notice who did the speaking: *They* did. Notice who did the enabling: *The Spirit*. God did not do the speaking for them, but rather they moved their own mouths and did the speaking themselves. At the exact same time, the Holy Spirit was at work enabling them to speak in tongues.

Notice again that it does not say that they heard the words first in their minds and then spoke. That is not the way any of us speak. In everyday conversation, we do not usually plan out the words first and then say them. We just talk and the words come out simultaneously as our minds enable them.

Something similar is happening with the gift of tongues. Our voice is at work — larynx, tongue, lips, and facial muscles all doing their part — even as the Holy Spirit (instead of our minds) directs the words we say. It takes both the Holy Spirit and you for the gift of tongues to work.

If you believe the gift of the Spirit is for you, you are ready to receive the gift of tongues. Why not pray now and receive? 🙏

NOTES

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2. Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949).
3. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 4.



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If Home Depot and Lowe's are geographically close to each other and you need to buy a hammer, pick up some potting soil, or purchase a leaf blower, which of these big box home-improvement stores will earn your business?

Research suggests you will determine your answer by the memories of your last customer service experience at either store. Price will come in a poor second to "They treat me like I am invisible," or "It takes forever to find someone to help me."

Does this basic customer-service principle have anything to do with the saints who regularly receive your ministry?

Before answering this question, what is your response to these questions? Are parishioners leaving your congregation to worship in another fellowship? Was their decision driven just by theology or dogma?

I guarantee that scintillating theological debates about amillennialism and pedobaptism will not hold any holy water when compared with, "No one from the staff visited me when I was sick for 3 weeks," or "The pastor can never remember my name."

As an outside consultant who assists congregations in designing and implementing a strategic plan, I often propose that they determine

their customer service quotient (a numerical score indicating the congregation's competence in offering outstanding customer service). I am often rebuffed with the reframe, "Excuse me, Cal, but Christians are not customers."

"Why not?" I ask.

The reply usually is, "Well, the gospel is not sold on some Walmart aisle."

"You are right," I respond, "the gospel is not sold with Diet Coke, disposable diapers, and lawn fertilizer. But like Walmart, is it not true the church has a product, a delivery system, and ... customer evaluations?"

I hear silence.

The Christian Consumer's Collective Unconscious

We file each episode of life into an area of our neocortex called the hippocampus. This brain file drawer opens every time we have an experience. The hippocampus stores this experience, glued together by a few million synapses, creating a lasting impression. And this filed impression will determine whether we return to the same pharmacy, restaurant, vacation

destination, or place of worship.

Impressions become belief systems and, whether this is a belief in our Lord or the fashion selections of Lord and Taylor, our memories are the residue of our belief systems. Memories (our collective unconscious) will determine whether or not we come back for more.

The people who sit facing you, in your Greek class, sanctuary, mission station, house church, or college classroom, are constantly creating and editing an impression of you and your message. This collective unconscious will determine your Kingdom customer service.

Four Expectations of the Faithful

Your customers bring with them four nonverbal expectations.

First, they want **customization**. Customization is your hard work to make sure you specifically mold the good news around the uniqueness of your customer's real life.

If you want to know the trade secret of Facebook and MySpace, do not look any further beyond the millions who have plastered their picture, name, and story for the world to see.

Second, your consumer wants **added value and excellence**. This is where choices appear. In the church, I call this process *cycling of the saints*. When people of faith have choices, they look for a comfortable spiritual home saturated with excellence. They eagerly gravitate to proclamation percolating with precision, competent spiritual education for their children, and vibrant worship. If these religious consumers do not find what they are looking for, they cycle to another expression of the body of Christ.

Third, your customers want **fast response and delivery**. The obsolescence of technology has fermented



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a new impatience in all of us. From refusing to wait for a traffic light to turn green, a drive-thru food order shoved out a small window by the time you pull forward, or a painfully slow Internet connection, our world spins in nanosecond precision.

The recipients of your ministry are expecting the church to answer their voicemail, e-mail, and text messages with the same timeliness with which they sent them. These denizens of the digital age are expecting the church to deliver on promised deadlines. The "I will get back to you somewhere in the future" excuses no longer hold any holy water for the faithful.

Fourth, and this is nothing new for the church, your parishioners are expecting **they will not get lost in your crowd**. Megachurches, megaChristian education, megamissions or anything megakingdom of God have a liability ... success can depersonalize the adherent into a cold statistic.

The people who sit facing you are constantly creating and editing an impression of you and your message.

If I am a digitized name appearing on a rapidly expanding database (a name no one on staff can remember or correctly pronounce) and find out today my brother has pancreatic cancer, I need to be served by someone in a faith community who genuinely cares about me. When big loses people, flesh-and-blood hurting people — the lost leave.

The Extraordinary

If you buy a new shirt at a Nordstrom Department Store and want to immediately wear it, they will not hesitate to iron that shirt in a backroom.

If you purchase an L.L. Bean backpack and come back from hiking in the Rockies with a torn zipper from a rock, you can send it back to them and they will either fix the zipper or just send you a new backpack.

If your flight on Southwest Airlines is delayed due to a mechanical malfunction, the airline may give you a free ticket anywhere in the United States to compensate you for your time.

As a consumer, I have been surprised with service ... service I was not expecting ... and I eagerly became their best salesperson.

Corporate America believes they can win the competition wars by just exceeding customers' expectations.

So, what is the surprise you have for those who receive your ministry today?

Surprising your customers begins with identifying your ministry's core expectation. In other words, what are the basic deliverables when you serve others?

Preaching, teaching, visiting the sick, marrying and burying ... you know, the basics.

Extraordinary makes its appearance when you follow up your preaching with a set of e-mailed questions you send on Tuesday to prod parishioners into practicing what they learned from God's Word on Sunday morning.

Extraordinary is a personal handwritten note of appreciation for a church leader who spent an entire evening in a hospital waiting room with distraught parents whose son was severely injured in an automobile accident.

Extraordinary may be driving 300 miles to attend a college graduation ... of an emerging adult who used to attend your fellowship.

The message of the gospel has always been about God showing up when we least expected Him. Our Lord has always practiced the extraordinary.

It's the Little Things: Service and Servanthood

It is a profound, heart-stopping moment.

The brawny, smelly fisherman, Peter, has been tagging along with Jesus of Galilee for several years, and it looks like his devotion will finally pay off with position and power.

The dinner is progressing nicely, and it looks like the Man will be making some major announcement about adjustments to the Kingdom's flowchart, and Peter is sure he will move up with a direct, dotted line to the Mover and Shaker of the Universe.

And then, Jesus, for some weird reason, takes off His business suit and dons a large towel, normally worn by the hired help (John 13:1-17). Peter's Lord asks him to extend his feet. Peter responds, "Hey, Master, what are You doing.... You know we have hourly wage folks for this kind of thing."

Jesus responds, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (verse 8).

Our faith drags us to feet. Service with a smile ... and a towel.

The incentive for us to offer extraordinary customer service in the Kingdom is not dictated by Walmart, Walgreens, or Wally World. The church should not get jerked around to emulate the giants in commercialism.

At the same time, why should the church practice less than exemplary service? You see, Kingdom customer service was here long before Walmart staff started wearing vests emblazoned with, "How may I help you?"

The Church trademarked that question 2,000 years ago outside an empty tomb. ☪



Coaching Your Team Through **CHANGE**

Change is hard, and it makes leadership dangerous.

While managers simply seek to tweak existing processes, leaders seek to replace old wineskins with new ones. This makes leadership dangerous. People love to cling to old wineskins — which isn't to say they love them — they just love clinging to them. Prying their fingers loose is dangerous, so most leaders settle for managing what is in their hands, rather than leading people to something new.

After all, leaders take the arrows in the back, the barbs to the side, and run into the walls built in front of them — all designed to stop change and preserve the status quo. It's a settled law of leadership that people resist change.

But, like most things that are settled, it may not be as settled as we think. If people resist change so much, why

do they engage in activities that radically change their lives?

What two events bring the most transformation to life? Marriage and childbearing. These two events change our lives more than anything else, yet people still get married and have children. We volunteer for life-changing events. Doesn't that seem strange for people so resistant to change?

Further, we adapt and even demand new technology. I have never considered myself a techno-geek, but the other day I unloaded my briefcase: a laptop, a smart phone, a Bluetooth device, a portable MP3 player, and a GPS device. Not bad for someone who isn't tech-savvy. Think about all the change we have embraced to own each of these devices.

As with most issues, the truth is in the tension. People resist change because leaders do not proffer change in appealing ways. In the book, *Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard*, authors Chip and Dan Heath explode three myths about change that, when believed, push people to resist rather than embrace change.

As you coach your team through change, understand that people are paradoxical — they both resist and embrace change. They are schizophrenic when it comes to change. So, it is important for the leader to make choices based on truth, not myth, as they coach the team through change.

Myth 1: People Always Resist Change

According to *Switch*, what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. As

leaders, we often suggest change in the broadest terms, rather than indicating simple steps to take for change to happen.



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If we do introduce change beyond broad terms, we overcomplicate it with too many details that overlap and confuse the issue rather than bring clarity.

The church I lead is a multiethnic, multigenerational church with a diverse economic income. One of our primary aims is to demonstrate reconciliation. It is not enough to tell the pastoral staff and volunteer leaders to demonstrate reconciliation. That edict does not carry enough clarity. One pastor might demonstrate reconciliation by having a foot washing service for people from different groups, while another might institute a strict quota system to make sure all groups are represented on a ministry's leadership team.

With an unclear edict chances are nothing will happen. Why? Because leaders did not provide enough clarity. In fact, leaders give their team too many choices. When we face too many choices, we revert to the status quo.

Think about the ice cream store with 31 or more flavors. How many times have you ventured outside your favorite flavor? Most people do not reach beyond the standard flavors of chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry. When leaders present people with too many options, they become uncomfortable. Should we go with this one, or that one, or the one over there? And so, they do nothing.

As leaders, we often view this as resistance when it is really a lack of clarity.

In our case, we developed seven core convictions for a multiethnic, multigenerational church with diverse incomes. We talked with each pastoral staff member and other leaders about how they could implement these core convictions in their ministries to demonstrate reconciliation. Bringing clarity broke down the walls of resistance.

Myth 2: People Resist Change Because They Are Lazy

The authors of *Switch* make a different assertion. Instead of assuming your team is lazy when it resists change, consider that what looks like laziness is often exhaustion. Change takes effort.

Most leaders recognize they only have so much change in their pockets. Leaders understand there is not an unlimited supply of change they can initiate in an organization. Past success, the trust level of the people, the current morale of the organization, and a number of other complicated factors temper the desire to change. Wise leaders understand how much change is in their pocket and never overspend.

Most leaders fail to recognize their team members have only so much change in their pockets. While leaders have the ability to initiate a limited amount of change at one time, followers have the ability to implement a limited amount of change as well. Wise leaders understand they may have leftover change because team members are suffering from change overload.

Think of it like this. You spend most of your day on autopilot. You do not think about getting ready for work in the morning. You just do it. You do not think about driving the kids to school. You just do it.

How many times have you found yourself on the way to the school with no kids in the car? You were on autopilot heading in the direction you normally travel. This is how we live much of our lives — until someone asks us to change. Then, we must exert emotional, mental, and spiritual energy to change course.

Members of our team only have so much of this energy. When we exhaust their energy by initiating

too much change at once, we often interpret it as laziness on their part when in fact we may simply be moving too quickly.

Myth 3: Problems With Change Are Always People Problems

Many problems with change have little to do with people; they have everything to do with broken systems and busted processes. We do not always make the path of change clear for our team members to follow. We tell them to change, but we leave the path cluttered and filled with obstacles.

Church leaders often bemoan the lack of people who sign up for ministries or volunteer opportunities. One church I am familiar with advertised for ministry opportunities in the bulletin and by video announcements, but saw little results in the number of people signing up.

What was wrong? Did the people lack commitment? Were the advertisements not appealing? Was there a need for new pastors to lead those ministries? Was a wholesale cultural change necessary?

The answer? None of the above.

What they needed was a clear path. At the end of each announcement or video, they said, "For more information, call extension 222." Not surprisingly, no one

called. People might have been interested, but they had to leave the service, go home, wait until the church office opened the next day, and make a phone call. Between Sunday morning and Monday morning the world revolves a full revolution and so do people's lives.

This church did not have a people problem; it had a path problem.

The solution was simple. The church inserted a connection card in the worship folder. To respond to an announcement, people sign up on a connection card and drop it in the offering. They do not need to wait, remember an extension, or even go to the lobby. Sign-ups have exploded.

The pastor could have harangued the team or the church for its lack of commitment, preached a series on getting involved, or cleared the path of obstacles. It was not a people problem; it was a path problem.

As you coach your team through change, the assumptions you make are important. Yes, change is hard. And that makes leadership dangerous. But, your assumptions may exacerbate the change process, rather than enable it. As you begin to initiate change, it might be good to embrace these three assumptions and correlating actions:

1. What looks like *resistance* is often a *lack of clarity*, so provide crystal clear direction.
2. What looks like *laziness* is often *exhaustion*, so be sure to measure the amount of change in your pocket, as well as your team's.
3. What looks like a *people problem* is often a *situation problem*, so be sure to create an uncluttered path for your team to travel. ☺



NON-PROFIT STATUS:

In Our Desire To Engage Culture, Are We Disengaging With Our Call?

After three road trips Paul knew the routine. Within 24 hours of returning he was to report to the main office and download the results to the shareholders.

This recent trip was the longest of the three. There was much to tell. Stepping into the conference room, Paul saw the usual cast. He felt safe.

After some fast hugs, winks, smiles, and high fives, Paul started reporting to the apostles. He highlighted his debrief with the real traction he is sensing with the Gentiles. The gospel is making sense. These inroads have been years in the making. Pentecost seems to be sprouting worldwide wings.

But before Paul could get through one or two stories, the elders hijacked the conversation. They were deeply grateful for the report and took time

to give God the glory, but Paul could tell they were unsettled. The elders of the Early Church were fidgety for a reason. They

were facing a near riot just outside their doors, something about which Paul appeared to be ignorant.

"You see, brother [Paul], how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. ... they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews ... to forsake Moses" (Acts 21:19–21, ESV¹). A total meltdown was brewing. The apostles knew it. Those outside that room viewed Paul as a Moses hater, an act of high treason for the religious.

For all intents and purposes, Paul's Gethsemane was officially under way. The next 10 years of his life would be dictated for him.

The apostles explained to Paul that the best way to beat back the riot was to cut his hair and do likewise with the

four men they had secured privately. Paul was to pay all expenses and enter the temple. Through this plan, they intended to make Paul look the part of a Moses follower without compromising his love for Christ. In other words, he was to find that invisible sweet spot between "law abiding and law loving."

Paul, to his credit, obliged their request, paid all the dues, and entered the temple, but the reprieve from the mob was short lived. After nearly 7 days, a riot, driven by hatred for Paul, filled the streets outside the temple area.

What happened next is a prophetic word and warning for the American church. It speaks volumes about the role of leadership and what the collapse of courage looks like.

Paul had hints about the larger things that lay ahead as he ended his third missionary journey. Agabus had all but given him a final draft of what was to come. There would be chains and abuse for Paul in Jerusalem. These would come with irreversible velocity. But Paul would have nothing to do with going into seclusion. He felt prepared for whatever was ahead. If only we could say the same today.

Most men or women, when called by God into leadership, know there is a disagreeing world somewhere out there — a culture that needs Christ. We see this culture as unbelieving, but not as a violent mob waiting to express itself. So we set out to connect with our immediate culture through social media, a creative sermon, a cup of coffee, and laughter. But not so fast.

Beneath that thin layer of temporary acceptance is a society who, when they hear the message of Christ and His cross ... His holiness ... His narrow way ... begin to gag on the gospel. They see it



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as a threat to their way of life.

Connecting with culture is a wonderful thing, a God thing. But to make it the goal of leadership is a grave mistake. The rioting crowd had no interest whatsoever in “connecting” with Paul. Instead, they attacked him and began killing him. Make no mistake, they wanted Paul more than just out of Jerusalem, they wanted him dismembered in a brutal street killing. A Roman centurion saved Paul from certain death by pulling him from the riot up onto a stairwell.

What happened next changed my leadership life.

Having been given freedom through the centurion’s intervention, you would think Paul would slip into a season of obscurity and save his own skin. But remember, God had called Paul to ministry.

Paul demanded that the guard allow him to address the very mob that wanted him dead. Motioning with his hand, Paul opened his mouth and began speaking in the “Hebrew dialect” (Acts 21:40, NASB²). The effective use of Hebrew (or perhaps Aramaic) stunned the crowd. Moments ago they saw him as a Moses hater, yet here he was speaking in the Hebrew dialect.

Scripture tells us that the crowd grew “hushed.” The word for “hushed” means to “grow relaxed.” They settled down because they realized they were listening to a friend, not an enemy.

For the moment Paul had connected. He trumped culture. He got the haters to hush and swallow their own venom and act respectfully.

The sound of

Hebrew dialect threw them off their game. The haters wondered if they were wrong about Paul. Maybe he was one of them; maybe he was not who they thought he was. But let’s be clear: the absence of hatred for Paul was no shift in their acceptance of the Kingdom; they simply were accepting Paul as one of them.

We have made the seducing and the relaxing of the crowd the measuring stick for the American church experience. But getting secular people, who by nature and profession are Christ haters, to make a shift in their feelings is never the ultimate goal. The goal is the presentation and acceptance of the gospel.

As Paul looked out from the stairwell and saw a relaxed and agreeable crowd, he continued to tell them about his own story and the centrality of Christ in his life. He felt no responsibility for the outcome. That was God’s concern.

With the crowd eating out of his hand, Paul could not leave well enough alone. He spoke of his role during Stephen’s death. He spoke of a mentor named Ananias, a man devout by the standards of the Law. He spoke of his strict upbringing

and his teacher, Gamaliel. Great talking points when addressing Law lovers. But there was more.

As he continued to speak, he began to talk more and more about the transformational role Christ had played in his life.

Then he said it. “I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21, NASB).

The moment he said the word “Gentile,” his world turned upside down. “They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth. ...’ ” (verse 22, NASB). In one word Paul had reactivated the riot.

At times, modern leadership seems overly intoxicated by the idea of getting a secular crowd to relax and listen to our “Hebrew dialect.” And then, not wanting to jeopardize our popularity, we stop short of saying what needs to be said for fear we will reactivate the riot.

We need to use our “Hebrew dialect” and recognize that God has given all leaders a unique way to get the attention of a broken world. But that moment of attention is nothing more than one step in the process. Pastors and leaders cannot stop short in their presentation of the gospel

because we sense a reaction will surface.

People are wondering why so many churches have gone to a “non-prophet” status. May God keep us loving, but may He also keep us courageous. ☺

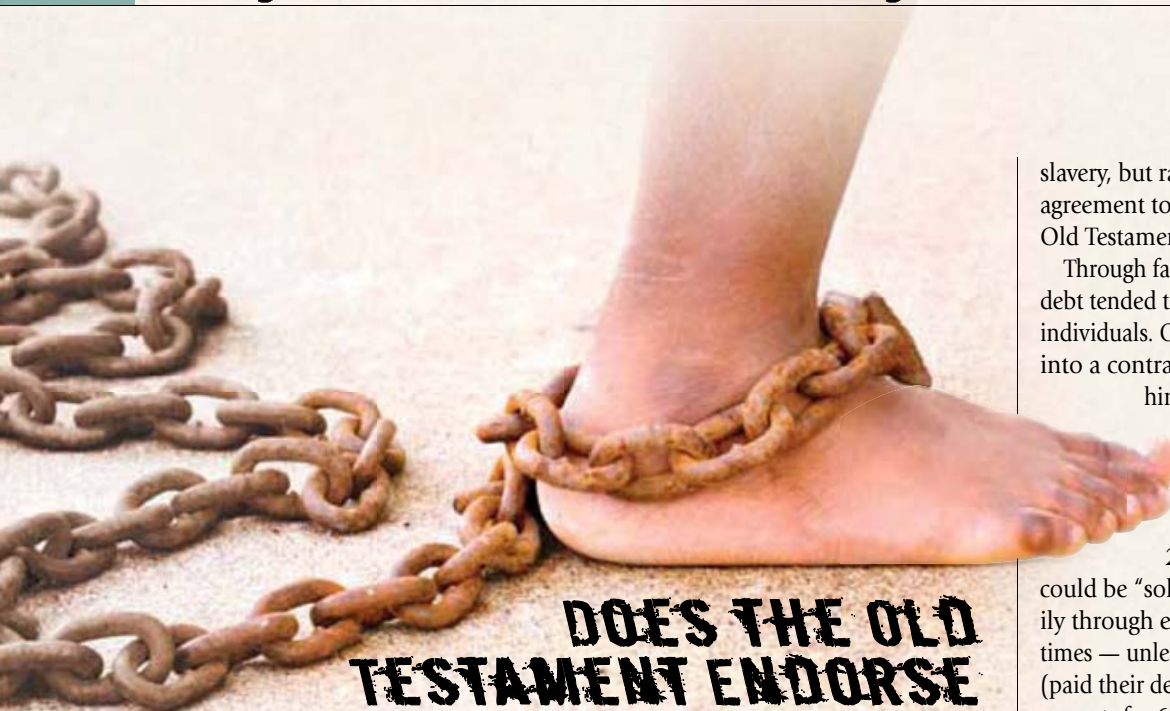
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**“We’re supposed to confess our faults one to another.
Mine is, I’m way too benevolent. Okay, now it’s your turn.”**

NOTES

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DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT ENDORSE SLAVERY?

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96) is the famed author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. When Abraham Lincoln met her when she came to the White House, he purportedly said, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!" Stowe described the nature of antebellum (pre-Civil War) slavery: "The legal power of the master amounts to an absolute despotism over body and soul," and "there is no protection for the slave's life."¹ When Christians and non-Christians read about slaves or slavery in Israel, they often think along the lines of antebellum slavery, with its slave trade and cruelties. This is a terrible misperception, and many — including the New Atheists — have bought into this misperception. Sam Harris writes that slaves are human beings who are capable of suffering and happiness. Yet the Old Testament regards them as "farm equipment," which is "patently evil."²

In this and two successive articles, I will address slavery in Scripture. In the first two articles I focus on slavery in the Old Testament.

The third will address slavery in the New Testament. For a more detailed discussion, see my book, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker, January 2011).

Hebrew Servanthood as Indentured Servitude

We should compare Hebrew debt-servanthood (many translations render this "slavery") more fairly to apprentice-like positions to pay off debts — much like the indentured servitude during America's founding when people worked for approximately 7 years to pay off the debt for their passage to the New World. Then they became free.

In most cases, servanthood was more like a live-in employee, temporarily embedded within the employer's household. Even today, teams trade sports players to another team that has an owner, and these players belong to a franchise. This language hardly suggests

slavery, but rather a formal contractual agreement to be fulfilled — like in the Old Testament.³

Through failed crops or other disasters, debt tended to come to families, not just individuals. One could voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement ("sell" himself) to work in the household of another: "one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself" (Leviticus 25:47). A wife or children could be "sold" to help sustain the family through economically unbearable times — unless kinfolk "redeemed" them (paid their debt). They would be debt-servants for 6 years.⁴ A family might need to mortgage their land until the Year of Jubilee every 50 years.⁵

Note: In the Old Testament, *outsiders did not impose servanthood* — as in the antebellum South.⁶ Masters could hire servants "from year to year" and were not to "rule over ... [them] ruthlessly" (Leviticus 25:46,53). Rather than being excluded from Israelite society, servants were thoroughly embedded within Israelite homes.

The Old Testament prohibited unavoidable lifelong servanthood — unless someone loved his master and wanted to attach himself to him (Exodus 21:5). Masters were to grant their servants release every seventh year with all debts forgiven (Leviticus 25:35–43). A slave's legal status was unique in the ancient Near East (ANE) — a dramatic improvement over ANE law codes: "Hebrew has no vocabulary of slavery, only of servanthood."⁷

An Israelite servant's guaranteed eventual release within 7 years was a *control or regulation to prevent the abuse and institutionalizing of such positions*. The release-year reminded the Israelites that



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poverty-induced servanthood was not an ideal social arrangement. On the other hand, servanthood existed in Israel precisely because poverty existed: no poverty, no servants in Israel. And if servants lived in Israel, this was voluntary (typically poverty-induced) — not forced.

The Dignity of Servants in Israel

Israel's servant laws were concerned about *controlling or regulating* — not *idealizing* — an inferior work arrangement. Israelites entered into servitude voluntarily — though not optimal. The intent of Israel's laws was to combat potential abuses, not to institutionalize servitude. The Old Testament punished forced slavery by death. Once a master freed a person from his servant obligations, the former servant had the "status of full and unencumbered citizenship."⁸

Old Testament legislation sought to *prevent voluntary debt-servitude*. God gave Mosaic legislation to prevent the poor from entering, even temporarily, into voluntary indentured service. The poor could glean the edges of fields or pick lingering fruit on trees after their fellow Israelites' harvest (Leviticus 19:9,10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:20,21; cp. Exodus 23:10). Also, God commanded fellow-Israelites to *lend freely to the poor* (Deuteronomy 15:7,8), and to *not charge them interest* (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36,37). And when the poor could not afford sacrificial animals, they could sacrifice smaller, less-expensive ones (Leviticus 5:7,11). Also, people were to automatically cancel debts every 7 years. And when a master released his debt-servants, he was to generously provide for them — without a "grudging heart" (Deuteronomy 15:10). The bottom line: *God did not want there to be any poverty (or servanthood) in Israel* (Deuteronomy 15:4). So, servant laws existed to

help the poor, not harm them or keep them down.

Rather than relegating treatment of servants ("slaves") to the end of the law code (commonly done in other ANE law codes), the matter is front-and-center in Exodus 21. For the first time in the ANE, God's legislation required treating servants ("slaves") as persons, not property. Genesis 1:26,27 affirms that all humans are God's image-bearers. Job states that master and slave alike come from the mother's womb and are ultimately equals (Job 31:13–15). As one scholar writes: "We have in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just in the interests of their masters."⁹

Three Remarkable Provisions in Israel

A simple comparison of Israel's law code with those of the rest of the ANE reveal three remarkable differences. If Bible-believing Southerners had followed these three provisions, antebellum slavery would not have existed or been much of an issue.

1. Anti-Harm Laws: One marked improvement of Israel's laws over other ANE law codes is the release of injured servants (Exodus 21:26,27). When an

employer ("master") accidentally gouged out the eye or knocked out the tooth of his male or female servant/employee, he/she was to go free. God did not allow physical abuse of servants. If an employer's disciplining his servant resulted in immediate death, that employer ("master") was to be put to death for murder (Exodus 21:20) — unlike other ANE codes.¹⁰ In fact, Babylon's Hammurabi's Code *permitted* the master to cut off his disobedient slave's ear (§282). Typically in ANE law codes, masters — not slaves — were merely financially compensated. The Mosaic Law, however, held masters to legal account for *their* treatment of their own servants — not simply *another* person's servants.

2. Anti-Kidnapping Laws: Another unique feature of the Mosaic Law is its *condemnation of kidnapping* a person to sell as a slave — an act punishable by death (Exodus 21:16; cp. Deuteronomy 24:7). Kidnapping, of course, is how slavery in the antebellum South could get off the ground.

3. Anti-Return Laws: Unlike the antebellum South, Israel was to offer safe harbor to foreign runaway slaves (Deuteronomy 23:15,16) — a marked contrast to the Southern states' Fugitive Slave Law. Hammurabi's Code demanded the death penalty for those helping runaway slaves (§16). In other less-severe cases — in the Lipit-Ishtar (§12), Eshunna (§49-50), and Hittite laws (§24) — *fin*es were exacted for sheltering fugitive slaves. Some claim that this is an improvement. Well, sort of. In these "improved" scenarios, *the slave was still just property*; the ANE extradition arrangements *still* required that the slave be returned his master. And not only this, the slave was going back to the harsh conditions that prompted him to run away in the first place.¹¹ Even upgraded laws in first millennium B.C. Babylon included



compensation to the owner (or perhaps something more severe) for harboring a runaway slave. Yet the returned slaves themselves were disfigured, including slitting ears and branding.¹² This isn't the kind of improvement to publicize too widely.

Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright observes: "No other ancient near Eastern law has been found that holds a master to account for the treatment of his own slaves (as distinct from injury done to the slave of another master), and the otherwise universal law regarding runaway slaves was that they must be sent back, with severe penalties for those who failed to comply."¹³

If the South had followed these three clear laws from Exodus and Deuteronomy, slavery would have been a nonissue.

What's more, Israel's treatment of servants ("slaves") was unparalleled in the ANE.

Next issue, I will look at some sticky "slavery" passages. 🗨️

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11. ANE legal texts references are from William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture: Volume II: Monumental Inscriptions From the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections From Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). See also Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Volume 1: The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum 2004).
12. Raymond Westbrook, ed., s.v. "Neo-Babylonian Period," *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, 2: 932.
13. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 292.

BIOTECHNOLOGY: Becoming Responsible Stewards of Knowledge

A biblical approach to resolving ethical dilemmas raised by advances in biotechnology

Biotechnology began in antiquity when people used yeast to produce leavened bread. In 1857, Louis Pasteur discovered how this fermentation process worked. Today, we employ biotechnology to cure diseases, feed the world's population, restore the environment, and produce fuel. Biotechnology impacts our daily life in a myriad of ways. When you prepare your morning coffee¹, put on a clean white shirt², or order a cheeseburger for lunch³, you welcome biotechnology into your day. Yet the same biotechnology that brings cures and conveniences often raises ethical concerns. Are we playing God when we change the genetic blueprint of bacteria for human benefit? Will genetically modified crops destroy local ecosystems or, conversely, will they protect the environment by reducing the use of pesticides? Are man-made nanoparticles the answer to improved cancer treatment or are they a toxic hazard?

Challenging questions such as these demonstrate the need for careful bioethical analysis from a Christian perspective. Without a biblical framework for addressing these contemporary issues, pastors may

find themselves either avoiding discussions surrounding technology or viewing all technological progress with suspicion. Yet, parishioners benefit greatly from informed Christian leaders who can provide biblical guidance on difficult topics. Let us consider a biblical approach to resolving ethical dilemmas raised by advances in biotechnology.

Defining Biotechnology

Biotechnology involves the use of living things or derivatives of living things to make or modify products for a specific application. In short, biotechnology is applied biology. Since biotechnology involves modifying living things for human purposes, there is great potential for ethical concerns.

We use biotechnology in medicine, agriculture, engineering, and environmental remediation. For example, recombinant human insulin, the first-ever biotechnology medicine to be commercialized, entered the market in 1982, saving the lives of insulin-dependent diabetics allergic to insulin derived from the pancreases of cows and pigs. To make this biosynthetic human insulin, researchers inserted the gene for human insulin

into a small circle of DNA (plasmid) found in bacteria, turning the bacteria into little insulin producing factories. Today, most insulin is recombinant human insulin.

Another example of biotechnology in the medical field is the hepatitis B vaccine, considered the first anticancer vaccine by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This vaccine prevents the hepatitis B virus from causing liver damage that can lead to liver cancer. The hepatitis B vaccine consists of a viral protein (hepatitis B surface antigen) inserted into yeast cells. The yeast cells become factories for making the viral protein for vaccine production. Since the vaccine contains only one viral protein and not the whole virus, the vaccine cannot accidentally cause a viral infection.

An example of biotechnology used in the dairy industry is recombinant chymosin, the first commercial food product produced by genetic engineering. Chymosin, traditionally known as rennet, is an enzyme used to coagulate milk in the cheese-making process. Since 2000 B.C., cheese makers obtained this substance from the stomach of unweaned calves, lambs, and baby goats. The demand for chymosin in the cheese-making industry started to outstrip the supply of baby calf stomachs in the late 1960s. During the second half of the 1980s, the biotech industry developed a way to produce large quantities of highly pure calf chymosin by inserting the calf gene for this enzyme into microorganisms. Today, cheese makers manufacture more than 60 percent of cheese products using bioengineered chymosin.


Biotechnology contributes to environmental remediation by harnessing bacteria capable of breaking down organic



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toxins in soil. For example, we can clean soil contaminated by herbicides toxic to wildlife with soil bacteria such as *Pseudomonas putida*, the first patented organism in the world. In mere hours, these bacteria can rid the soil of toxins that would take a decade to break down on their own. *Pseudomonas putida* can also break down industrial contaminants such as toluene, a component of paint thinner. Bioremediation may involve the introduction of new organisms to a site or adjustment of environmental conditions to enhance the ability of existing organisms to degrade toxins.

Discerning a Biblical Perspective

While you will not find modern scientific terms in a Bible concordance, the Bible provides an ethical framework for addressing contemporary issues that arise from technological advances. The Bible teaches that while humans are part of creation, they stand apart from the rest of creation in two important ways. First, God created men and women in His image (Genesis 1:26–28). Second, God gave humans the responsibility to care for His creation (Genesis 2:15).

Since God created humans in His image, human life has special value. God also gave humanity dominion over the rest of the animals. Conducting research to develop ways to improve human life is an appropriate response to God's command to subdue the earth. Yet, those created in the image of God carry the responsibility of reflecting the character of God. God does not forget the needs of the sparrow (Luke 12:6). Similarly, humans must not overlook the needs of God's creation. We must treat animals humanely. We must not be careless with the environment or wasteful with the Earth's resources.

The biblical model of mankind's relationship with the rest of creation is that of stewardship. In the Bible, a steward was a servant who took care of the affairs of his master's household. Stewardship implies a responsibility to care for some-

thing that belongs to another. The Bible teaches, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). While we can use living creatures for the well-being of humans, we must realize that we are responsible for not harming God's creation in our use of technology.

Finally, the Bible teaches that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:33). Thus, we must consider technologies in light of their effect on human relationships. Does the technology help some people at the expense of others? Does the technology provide convenience today at the expense of the needs of future generations? Does the technology uphold the dignity of human life?

Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

The Bible teaches that we must be responsible stewards of our technological knowledge. The Bible provides answers to ethical dilemmas by showing us the correct questions to ask when examining the merits of a new advance in biotechnology. For example, we can ask whether or not the new technology respects the sanctity of human life. Does the technology promote the treatment of human life as a commodity? How does the new technology impact social structures? We must examine the effects of a technology in context. For example, an advance in agricultural biotechnology, such as the development of a disease-resistant crop, may be a blessing for large-scale commercial farms in the United States. However, a subsistence farmer in sub-Saharan Africa who does not have access to the biotech seed will realize no benefit, although his need is greater. We must develop ways of making technological advances available to those most in need alongside the technology itself.

In dealing with technology that modifies living things for human purposes, we must question the impact a genetically engineered organism might have on the wider environment. What safeguards must be in place to use the technology

properly? Certain technology may be acceptable for use in a country with adequate safety standards, but unacceptable in a country where such standards are not sufficiently developed.

While biotechnology can evoke fears of man playing God because biotechnology deals with living things or derivatives of living things, biotech solutions may be far safer than when man uses chemical reactions outside of living systems to synthesize new chemicals such as pesticides. A recombinant protein manufactured in yeast for use in a vaccine is usually much purer than the same protein extracted from the original animal source. A man-made nanoparticle is not necessarily dangerous just because it is constructed in a laboratory. Yet, caution is in order anytime man synthesizes a substance outside of its natural context.

Pastors would do well to avoid simple black and white pronouncements regarding biotechnology. Biotechnology can bring us wonderful discoveries as helpful as the pasteurization process that safeguards the milk you pour on your cereal at breakfast. Yet we need to regulate biotechnology adequately and engage in ethical reflection to ensure we are becoming responsible stewards of the knowledge we are gaining through research. Pastors have the responsibility of teaching their congregations the biblical model of stewardship that must be used to resolve the ethical dilemmas that arise from technological progress. 🌀

NOTES

1. Coffee filters often are made with a biotechnology process that uses enzymes to bleach the filter paper, reducing the amount of chlorine and energy used in manufacturing. This process is better for both the environment and the health of coffee drinkers.
2. Most laundry detergents contain enzymes developed through biotechnology to remove deep stains, such as grass stains. These enzymes replace the phosphate additives that pollute rivers and streams. The enzymes also allow washing at lower temperatures, conserving energy.
3. Approximately 60 percent of all hard cheese products are made using the biotech enzyme, chymosin, to curdle milk during cheese production (<http://www.bio.org/speeches/pubs/solutions/life.asp>).

I Don't Have Any Close Friends

Q: My husband and I have been pastors at a medium-sized suburban church for 5 years. I have two children and my life is quite busy with church and family. There is one problem: I find that I am feeling lonely for a close friend. I have always been a social person and grew up with lots of friends. However, I am having a hard time truly connecting with anyone here. I am happy that people respond positively to our leadership and seem to respect us, but I lack that safe place where I can truly be myself. What can I do about my growing loneliness?

A: Loneliness is by far the most commonly expressed challenge of pastors' wives. Occasionally, I meet a woman in ministry who is happily fulfilled in relationship and friendship. Much more frequently, however, I hear everything from wistful longings to outright angry resignation when the topic of connection with other women comes up. Even though group settings are a frequent occurrence in ministry, and we are highly visible to the women in our churches, pastors' wives continually confront the gulf between themselves and true, authentic, honest connection with others.

Upon closer examination the challenge is twofold. First, the relationship between ministry leadership and congregation seems to be somewhat fragile and prone to unexpected challenges. Second, relationship building with women

outside the congregation brings a different set of scheduling and political challenges.

Any friendship requires

risk. It is also true that friendships within the church carry some unique challenges.

- There are those who seek status through relationship with the leadership. It is not always evident from the beginning.
- Those with a long history of leadership difficulties and broken relationships will tend to repeat those problems.
- When families go through difficult personal times, they often blame those closest to them for the inner angst and lack of peace they feel. They distance themselves, believing it will relieve their pain.
- Since church is family, people respond to tensions the way they do in their biological family.
- A person who is overly eager to quickly build close bonds is more likely to walk away from those

bonds just as quickly.

- People are not always mature in the way they handle inner tension, discomfort, and conflict, especially when it comes to spiritual things.

Be aware, but do not fear. Remember that safe, compassionate, and loyal people can be found in virtually every congregation. Not everyone will betray or wound you. Finding those who are safe and mature requires time and prayerful vigilance.

Building friendship will require some work on your part. In our busy, disconnected culture it is rare for relationships to just fall into place with no effort. Understanding the importance of meaningful connection should motivate you to take the steps to pursue it diligently.

1. Deal With Your Fears. Friendship requires risk. In life and relationship there are no guarantees that wounding will never happen. You can risk because of Jesus' unconditional love in your life. If you have experienced hurt, the risk feels even greater. In the power of Christ's love and protection, you can risk again.

2. Pray, Pray, and Pray Again. Pray for a friend. Ask God to open your eyes to possibilities you may not have even considered. Ask Him to give you creativity if time constraints or finances are an issue.

3. Reach Out and Initiate. Do the work. When you meet someone you feel drawn toward, take the next step. Ask her to coffee or invite her to join you in one of your activities. You have little to lose other than a few hours of time and the cost of a cup of coffee.

4. Proceed Wisely. Be aware of the limitations of church friendships. Seek out people who are safe. Look for stable, secure, nondemanding women who are able to keep confidences. If hurt



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happens, learn from the experience rather than becoming bitter.

Once you have established some safe, solid relationships be aware of the limitations and adjust your expectations. First, it is not wise to share your marital concerns with a member of the congregation if your husband is the pastor. Remember that your friend's relationship with her leader/shepherd will be negatively affected by your input. This is a misuse of the friendship because it is not in her best interest.

Under no circumstances should you discuss congregational drama and conflict with your church friend. The temptation is strong, but it is a mistake for which you will reap consequences. If she is not already involved in it, spare her the details. Once you have stirred up the issue, it is often impossible to lay it down once again.

Sadly, even the closest friendships can be affected by church conflict. Remember that spirituality and emotions are closely connected. Church conflict has the ability to arouse strong, punitive, negative emotions. Be aware of the possibilities but do not fear them. Whenever possible, talk openly about challenges that arise. When and if you are confronted by a broken relationship, pursue forgiveness and grace and stay committed to risking again.

Aside from relationships within the congregation, I believe it is healthy to develop relationships outside the immediate circle of the congregation where you minister. This, too, carries its challenges. Ministry wives tend to live very busy lives. Making the effort to meet with someone across town often requires calendar juggling and creative determination. On top of that, congregational

migration and drama can cause tension or discomfort between neighboring church leaderships.

Still, it is worth the effort to overcome these challenges. Having a friend who is not acquainted with all the intimate details of your church life can be refreshing. Put aside congregational differences and rumors and seek to know that neighboring ministry worker through your own eyes. Be prepared to initiate contact with more than one person and do not give up too easily. If the reports I am hearing are correct, a very large percentage of women in ministry and pastors' wives feel exactly as you do. They, too, are looking for a friend.

Do not resign yourself to a lonely existence. Press forward prayerfully into new territory where strong connection becomes a catalyst to greater fulfillment and impact. ☯



Mack had arrived to work early that morning, and he was thankful to have a few minutes of peace before starting what was scheduled to be a very full day. He was just pouring his morning cup of coffee when the slamming of the front door startled him, causing him to miss his cup and spill coffee all over the counter. The

voices of Bertha and Jake reverberated throughout the building as they arrived for their final premarital counseling session. "I ain't doing it!" Mack heard Jake exclaim. "I ain't never wore one of them 'monkey suits,' and I ain't gonna do it now."

"Well, I ain't walking down the aisle to marry no

flannel-shirted Levi-wearin' lumberjack, either!"

Mack met them in the hallway outside his office and interrupted their intense fellowship. "I see you two lovebirds are up cooing a bit early this morning."

"Oh, hey, Pastor," Bertha said, blushing with embarrassment, "I didn't see your car out front."

"Annie's using it to do some matron-of-honor shopping," Mack responded. "And for the record, she's using my credit card, too. I may have to send you the bill when this is all over."

"Send it to Jake. He can pay for it with the money he saved by not renting a tux for our wedding," Bertha snorted derisively.

"It's a penguin-suit, Pastor! Now everyone knows there ain't no penguins in Alaska, and I plan on keepin' it that way! I ain't wearing no 'penguin-suit' and especially I ain't wearing no tie."

Mack stepped into his office and motioned the both of them to sit down. As he walked to his chair, he sighed, "Tsk, tsk, tsk — Jake, Jake, Jake — Bertha, Bertha, Bertha. Seven weeks of counseling and we're still at square one. What am I to do with you two?"

"It's her fault. She called me a hill-billy clodhopper, and she ain't showing me a lick of respect."

"Correction, I called you *Mister* Hillbilly Clodhopper and if that ain't respectful, I don't know what is."

Mack tried hard to hide his smile at Bertha's reply. "So what are you planning to wear to the wedding, Jake?" he asked innocently.

"Well, Pastor, I got me a pert' new set of Carharts — black, mind you — and a bran' new red flannel shirt."

"Well, I know that passes for Alaska formal wear, but Bertha's a city gal and we're dealing with mostly city folk here."

Mack paused before continuing, "Jake, do you remember how we defined 'love'?"

"Yeah, 'Always promotin' t'other's welfare.' Is that what ya mean?" Jake asked.



"Close enough. And don't you think that 'promoting the other's welfare' would include making them happy if it is within your means to do so?"

Jake paused for a long moment then responded with a sigh. "I reckon yore right, Pastor."

Glancing quickly at Bertha, Jake capitulated, "Okay, I'll wear the tuck-ceder."

Bertha smiled in relief, "Thank you, Jake. And I'll tell ya what, since you gave a little, I'll give a little. If your main objection to the 'penguin suit' is the ole 'tie that binds,' you can leave that part off."

Jake's face brightened, "No tie? You mean it?"

"Yeah, with that beard nobody will know you're tie-less anyway." Bertha's face softened as she gave Jake's beard an affectionate stroke.

"Now if you guys can learn to compromise like that without my coaching, your marriage will be alright," Mack predicted.

Mack closed the session with a recap of the schedule for the rehearsal and the wedding. As they were leaving the office, Bertha turned and said, "Oh, by the way, I've decided that we'd like to do our own vows, and surprise each other on the big day. Is that okay, Pastor?"

Jake was caught off guard. "Whaddy'a mean *you've* decided?"

Mack quickly jumped in to distract the two from having yet another disagreement. "Ah — I'd really like to stick to the traditional vows, but if you and Jake would like to add something personal before the vows that *might* be a nice touch," Mack cautiously agreed, thinking to himself, *Or it might be a total disaster.*

"Now, lookee here," Jake interjected, obviously panic-stricken, "I ain't decided no such thing. I ain't no public speaker, and I ain't memorizin' nuttin'. I'm gonna

have a hard enough time just gettin' out the 'I do.' "

"Well, Jake, maybe you could write something out and just read it," Mack suggested.

"Yeah, like that romantic poem ya sent me when we first started courting," Bertha added.

"Ya mean the one where ya wrote back to me afterwards and called me a smelly old goat?"

"That's the one," Bertha confirmed. She then turned to explain to Pastor Mack. "I was playing hard to get."

"Seems to have worked," Mack said with a grin.

"Like a smelly old charm," Jake confirmed.

**"I been workin' out regular,
but I'm kinda worried
I won't be able to hoist
Bertha an' carry her over
the threshold."**

Excitement was running high as folks gathered in for the big wedding. Jake was behind the platform, in the baptismal dressing area, nervously awaiting the commencement of the festivities. His son and best man, George, was tying the rings to the ring-bearer's pillow.

"Hello, Jake, George. Boy, you two sure are looking sharp." They murmured their thanks and stood a little taller in response to Mack's greeting.

Noticing the little ring-bearer standing shyly behind his father's legs, Mack stuck out his hand and said, "Hi, Benny, you look great, too. Sorry you were sick and had to miss rehearsal last night."

Benny said nothing, regarding Mack with a bit of a frown.

Putting his hand on Jake's shoulder, Mack asked, "And how's the groom?"

"Skeered, Pastor, that's what I am — plum skeered."

"Of what?"

"Well, you know I got me a good job down at the Bear Mountain Fitness Center, and I been workin' out regular, but I'm kinda worried I won't be able to hoist Bertha an' carry her over the threshold."

Mack chuckled, "Maybe at your age you should forget about that part of the wedding tradition and just step over the threshold together — or maybe Bertha could carry you — you know, piggy-back like you do Benny sometimes."

"Yeah, wouldn't that be a sight?" Jake cackled while George joined him.

"Well, you just make sure Bertha knows she is the most important thing in your life and whether or not you carried her over the threshold will never be an issue."

Mack barely finished that piece of advice, when someone stuck their head into the room and said, "Sister Bertha is ready; you guys need to take your places."

"Well, let's go fellows — and Jake, relax — smile! You're not on your way to the gallows; you're on your way to connubial bliss."

"What's 'bliss' mean?" Benny asked.

"I ain't gotta clue," Jake said, shrugging his shoulders, then in a hoarse whisper said to Mack, "Don't talk about that stuff in front o' the kid. T'ain't appropriate."

The men assumed their positions and the processional began. Mack's heart stirred with pride as his lovely wife, Annie, the matron-of-honor, made her stately walk down the aisle. In his mind's

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eye he saw her again in her white gown as he waited by the altar what seemed like only a few days before.

Bertha looked more beautiful than Mack would have ever thought possible, and Jake could be seen swallowing hard and running his finger under his collar.

When the time came for the final marriage vows, Mack made some preliminary remarks. "Before they take their formal vows, Jake and Bertha would like to express their love for one another in their own words. Jake I understand you have written something you would like to read to your bride."

Jake fumbled in his pocket, pulled out a piece of paper, cleared his throat and began to read:

*"I ain't much of a talker,
My tongue gets all tied,
But I'm making a promise
And I'm taking a vow;
I'll never love you,
Less than right now.
Amen."*

Bertha's eyes suddenly became a fountain of tears and as she wiped her eyes with one hand she signaled with the other that she was too overwhelmed to read her own vows. She was, however, able to croak out the appropriate "I dos" and "I wills." By the time they got to the exchanging of rings, a sense of normalcy had returned to the proceedings.

Mack reached over to take the rings from Benny's pillow, as he asked, "Do you have rings with which to seal these marriage vows?"

Suddenly, little Benny jerked the pillow away, held it to his chest, and ran down the aisle yelling, "No! Mine! Mine!"

One of the ushers reached out to grab him, but Benny was too fast. He hung a sharp left,

darted into an empty pew, crossed the sanctuary and headed toward a side door into the foyer.

George left his place beside Jake and launched himself in full pursuit of his errant son, adding to the guests' amusement.

Finally, just before he reached the front doors, an unnamed pursuer grabbed him by the back of his coat and arrested Benny's flight.

George arrived just in time to take a hand, and holding the squirming boy by the arm, dragged him, screaming, back to the launch point.

Mack watched helplessly as this drama unfolded, but once Benny was captured, he tried to bring order to the congregation, which by this time was bordering on the hysterical.

"Well, now, that was different. I've never had a ring-bearer run away before. Brides, yeah, and once a groom — but never a ring-bearer."

With the wedding party reassembled, the ceremony continued without further incident. The audience stood and clapped enthusiastically when Mack made the presentation of the newly wed couple: "I present to you Mr. and Mrs. Jake Smedley."

But instead of heading down the aisle

as expected, Bertha turned back to Pastor Mack and said, "Pastor, I know we already tied the knot, but I did have a special word for my sweetheart, and I'd like to say it now, iff'n it's okay."

"Sure, Bertha, it's your day, let's hear it."

Bertha tugged Jake around to face her directly and began to recite:

*"I didn't like you at first,
Not my cup o' tea;
But as time went on by
You became special to me.
Now I can say without any fear,
The once 'smelly old goat'
Is now truly my 'deer'."*

With that, Bertha grabbed Jake, gave him a big kiss, and then holding him at arm's length, shouted "Woo-eee! My bachelor huntin' days are over. I done tagged me a man!"

A few minutes later Mack and Annie were standing outside the church with the other guests, all of whom were shouting their good wishes and waving their good-byes. As the beer-decaded Mush Inn van, carrying the newlywed couple on the first leg of their new journey together, disappeared around the corner, Mack took Annie's hand and said, "Now, that is one strange lash-up. Who would have ever imagined those two getting together?"

"Well, there were a few who thought the same thing about us — including my mother and your mother, if I remember right," Annie said reflectively. "And I think we turned out okay."

"Yeah, we did, at that," Mack agreed, "and for two corn-fed Southerners our move north has turned out okay, too."

"Not just okay — perfect," Annie replied. "I've think we've found our home in Sourdough, Alaska." ☺

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"Happens every time he preaches a 'fire and brimstone' sermon."

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■ Lord, Send the Rain!

KENNETH D. BARNEY

TEXT: Hosea 10:12

INTRODUCTION

We have experienced long dry spells when the ground becomes parched and cracked, crops burn up in the heat, and water supplies begin to run short. Spoken or unspoken, the longing of everyone is, “Lord, send the rain!”

What a change when the showers finally begin to fall. People remark, “I was never so glad to see rain. It’s the most beautiful sight I have witnessed for a long time.” Men, beasts, and vegetation are refreshed. What rain does for our natural surroundings, the Holy Spirit does for our spiritual conditions. Our text sets forth some responsibilities God’s people face if we expect the rain of the Spirit to fall.

MESSAGE

1. The soil must be prepared.

- Our spirits can become like the fallow ground that has not felt the blade of the plow for a long time. Seed sown on such ground will not produce a harvest. Even if rain comes, the unprepared soil will not respond with a crop.
- The first preparation is seeking the Lord with new intensity. This includes praying in the Spirit. It involves a fervent commitment to Bible study. Some of the fallow ground has become so unyielding that time must be set aside to wait on the Lord — sometimes in intercessory prayer, sometimes in silent meditation — until we hear His voice and have a new sense of His presence.

2. The right seed must be sown.

- Ours is a permissive age, and the spirit of the age infiltrates even the hearts of God’s people when they do not exercise strong discipline. Righteousness is not popular in this day, but the Holy Spirit cannot bless people who are not separated from the influences of the world system. If we do not sow the seed of righteous living, the

rain will not produce a spiritual harvest.

- When we sow in righteousness, we can expect God’s mercy for our failures and shortcomings. When we confess them and turn back to the path of holiness, we can expect to “reap in mercy.”

3. Rain from heaven.

- When the rain of the Spirit falls, the revival it brings will not be superficial. It will be a rain of righteousness. A real move of the Spirit will bring a horror of sin to believers and a new commitment to the narrow way. When righteousness pervades the church, sinners will feel the influence of a holy people. Attending church services where such an atmosphere prevails will bring conviction for sin and a sense of spiritual need.
- The rain of the Spirit will bring new life and spiritual vigor to the church. Every program and activity will take on a new spirit. Joy and praise will replace a spirit of defeat and lethargy.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual revival involves both divine and human activity. Only God can send the rain, but preparing for it is our responsibility. When the rain comes, it will make every effort, every commitment, and every sacrifice worthwhile.

■ The Character of the Righteous

CLANCY HAYES, Waxahachie, Texas

TEXT: Genesis 6–9

INTRODUCTION

Humanity followed the example set by Adam and Eve, and sin had filled the world. Yet one man was found to be righteous before the Lord. An examination of Noah’s life will reveal three characteristics of godliness.

MESSAGE

1. A person of obedience.

- God provides clear instructions (Genesis 6:13–21).
- God offers man a choice (Genesis 6:21; 7:5).
- God keeps His Word (Genesis 7:17–24).

2. A person of patience.

- Patience during preparation for God’s work (Genesis 6:3).
- Patience while in the midst of a storm (Genesis 7:17).
- Patience when we think it’s time to go (Genesis 8:6–12).

3. A person of worship.

- He walked with God before the storm (Genesis 6:9).
- He worshiped God after the storm (Genesis 8:20–22).

CONCLUSION

Righteousness is not something we earn by eliminating evil from our lives. Righteousness is the outward sign of a person’s inner character. God still shapes and changes the character of those who wish to please Him. Noah’s lifestyle of obedience, patience, and worship provides an example of the character of one whom God proclaims righteous.

■ Perspective That Brings Peace

ROGER COTTON, Springfield, Missouri

TEXT: Psalm 73

INTRODUCTION

From the Psalmist's example we can see the perspective principles that bring peace.

MESSAGE

1. The perspective that brings peace is not the perspective of our pain (see verses 3,13–15,21).

- a. Presumption that feeds anger (verses 21,22).
 - (1) Others, especially the wicked or perverse, are painless and prosperous (verses 3–12).
 - (2) Feeling that it is a waste of time to be pure only to be punished continually (verses 13,14).
- b. Perspective of pain involves peril (verse 2).
 - (1) Peril of being unfaithful to God's people (verse 15).
 - (2) Peril of being less than God intended (verses 3,22).

2. The perspective that brings peace is the perspective of God's presence (verse 16).

- a. The wicked or perverse will perish — at any moment, completely, disregarded by God, dismissed from Him (verses 16–20,27).
- b. Promises His provisions of goodness or peace to the pure (verse 1) — His presence, fellowship, security, guidance, refuge, His glory (verses 23–28).
- c. Produces change or progress in us — in our perceptions, especially what God has done in the past, is doing now, and will do in the future; in our priorities of what really matters; in our practices and proclamation (verses 23–28).

3. Perspective that brings peace comes from a turning-point experience of God's presence.

- a. We can have this by entering the sanctuary of God instead of dwelling on our pain, the negatives, and doing things in our own strength (verses 15,16).
- b. The sanctuary where He offers grace and exercises His rule (Psalm 68:2–8), the place God the Holy Spirit lives. (His people are both corporately and individually His temple or sanctuary [1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21,22].)
- c. We have access by entering the sanctuary of God with a pure heart, a clear conscience, acknowledging our need, repenting of sin and sinfulness, and by faith accepting His forgiveness (verses 1,17,21–28).

CONCLUSION

The perspective that brings peace is not from focusing on our pain in this life but in turning to the presence of God, who is always with the pure in heart.

■ Significance of Pentecost

MELVIN L. HODGES

TEXT: Acts 2:12

INTRODUCTION

"What meaneth this?" We must not confuse the symbol — happy singing, manifestations, speaking in tongues, emotions — with the substance.

MESSAGE

1. Pentecost came to prepare the Church for its work.

- a. A complete and balanced gospel.
- b. Well-balanced and thinking people.
- c. Christian virtues — grace, holiness, gifts, and graces.
- d. Well-developed Christian character.
- e. Responsibility for evangelism and social needs.
- f. Each aspect of the gospel should receive its proper emphasis but balanced — not mistaking the leaf for the trunk.
- g. A biblical Pentecost.

2. A true Pentecost exalts Christ Jesus.

- a. Note the apostles' message.
- b. The Holy Spirit's work is to reveal Christ.
- c. Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected, Savior, Healer, coming King, Head of the Church, Baptizer, High Priest.
- d. Christ is our message. Tongues and healing are by-products. We do not preach denomination.
- e. True Pentecost will not exalt the individual.

3. True Pentecost results in the consecration of the entire being to God. The Baptism is not an extra.

- a. God intends for the Holy Spirit to control the life.
- b. Gives fire — impulse. (See the apostles' sacrifice and daring.)
- c. God conquers us. We are His. Tongue controlled is a symbol — not wrath, passion, or doubt.

4. Pentecost signifies the divine breath in the human soul. The Infinite dwells in the finite.

- a. Wind — inspiration.
- b. Christ breathed on disciples new life, new birth.
- c. At Pentecost the breath turned to a mighty rushing wind.
- d. Power in prayer.
- e. Liberty in worship.
- f. God dwells in His temple.

5. Pentecost signifies the divine power to reach out to humanity.

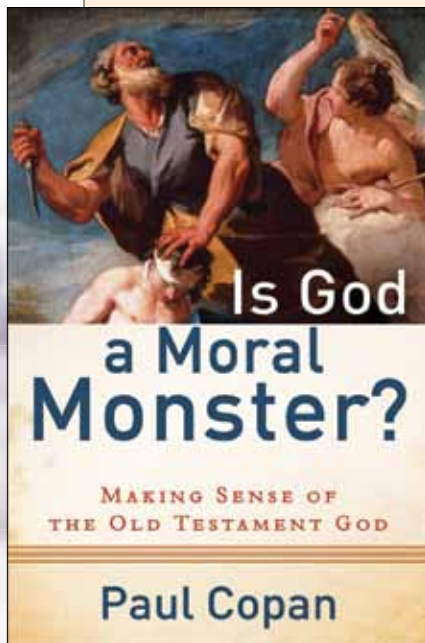
- a. At Pentecost — many tongues.
- b. The believer becomes the expression of God's heart.
- c. We are His witnesses. God uses men. Be ye reconciled to God.

CONCLUSION

Let us not defraud the holy purpose of God in sending the Holy Spirit to us.

For additional sermons, visit <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>. Look under Resources for Practical Ministry.

Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God



PAUL COPAN (Baker Books, 251 pp., paperback)

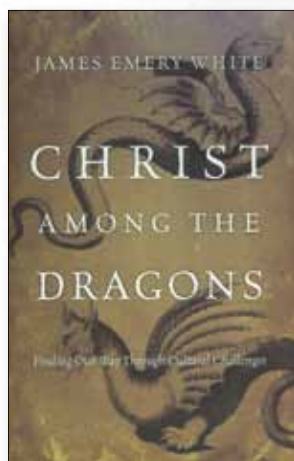
British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has declared God to be “a moral monster” and that religion is “the root of all evil.” Theologians have designated Dawkins and other New Atheists for the way they have resuscitated hackneyed objections to faith and repackaged them as a highly antagonistic and media-savvy secularism. New Atheists are particularly derisive of the God of the Old Testament and the “ubiquitous weirdness” of biblical morality.

In his book, *Is God a Moral Monster?* Paul Copan presents the core ideas of Old Testament ethics in a thoughtful and accessible manner. He addresses specific allegations of New Atheists against God and Scripture. He unpacks each accusation and uses it as a springboard to demonstrate the timeless relevance of the Old Testament as a revelation of God’s character and love, and His plan for the people and world He created.

Copan addresses subjects ranging from dietary laws to polygamy and human trafficking to judgment on idolatrous nations. His approach is biblically based and his style is clear, avoiding either a defensive tone or overly technical language. Especially insightful are the ways in which he demonstrates how both “Yahweh war in the Old Testament” and the Crusades are categorically different from Islamic Jihad.

Thorough notes and references provide the foundation for extensive further study and thought-provoking discussion. Study questions make this an excellent guide for studying apologetics and mapping the moral terrain of the Old Testament.

— Reviewed by Mike Beals, Ph.D.,
philosophy professor and pastor of Mission Hills Community Church, Rancho Santa Margarita, California.



Christ Among the Dragons:
Finding Our Way Through
Cultural Challenges

Christ Among the Dragons

JAMES EMERY WHITE (InterVarsity Press, 160 pp., hardcover)

When the medieval cartographer of the famed *Lenox Globe* (c. 1503–17) drew the outer edges of the end of the world as he knew it, he wrote three words to describe what lay beyond: *Hic sunt dragones*. “Here be dragons.” Hence the title of James Emery White’s newest book, *Christ Among the Dragons*. As evangelicalism gives way to an unknown and unexplored future, what really is at stake and how do we respond as the people of Christ?

White’s primary contention is that the very foundation of evangelicalism in America is faltering, even though numerous evangelical institutions built on that foundation still appear robust. “Simply put,” White maintains, “there is no longer a shared core.” Specifically,

four elements of that core are fragmenting — “a shared approach to truth, a joint sense of cultural engagement, a commitment to unity, and a deep commitment to and understanding of the church.”

White reflects on the pervasive influences of technology, postmodernism, and contemporary culture on each of these four core issues. His diagnosis is sobering even though his prognosis is hopeful.

White draws personally from a broad background in history, literature, and the arts. He is also a church-planting practitioner as well as an evangelical scholar. The result is valuable reading for anyone feeling the hot breath of the dragons and yet wanting to contend for authentic biblical faith in our time, and beyond.

— Reviewed by James T. Bradford, Ph.D.,
general secretary for The General Council of the Assemblies of God,
Springfield, Missouri.

Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ

LEONARD SWEET AND FRANK VIOLA (Thomas Nelson, 240 pp., hardcover)

The American church suffers from what Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola call "Jesus Deficit Disorder." Instead of paying sustained attention to Him, the church focuses on substitute issues: "justice," "morality," "values," and "leadership principles." In *Jesus Manifesto*, Sweet and Viola call the church back to her first love.

I appreciate three things about this book:

First, its biblical grounding: Chapter 1, "The Occupation of All Things," demonstrates from Scripture that the heavens, all creation, and both Testaments of Scripture are occupied with Christ. The only way we can read the Bible and not focus on Jesus is by misreading it.

Second, its personal orientation: Chapter 5, "A Ditch on Either Side," examines and critiques "two popular approaches to following Jesus among Christians today ... (1) theological rationalism and (2) theological ethics." When we reduce Christianity to what we believe or how we behave, we subtly move the focus off of Jesus. Who we follow matters most. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Third, its relational ethic: Chapter 3, "If God Wrote Your Biography," argues, "From the viewpoint of God, your biography is Jesus Christ." The Christian life is not about rules, but about relationship. We change when we are "in Christ" and in Christian community, which is the body of Christ.

Much else could be said about this book, including a few points of critique. Overall, however, *Jesus Manifesto* is a clarion call to the American church to focus anew on her Savior and Lord.

— Reviewed by George Paul Wood,
director of Ministerial Resourcing
and executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri.

The Lord's Prayer: Insight and Inspiration to Draw You Closer to Him

R.T. KENDALL (Chosen Books, 205 pp., paperback)

Like returning to a once favorite vacation spot and finding it again refreshing to body and soul,

R.T. Kendall takes us back to what might be the most over-recited, yet strangely overlooked passage in the entirety of God's Word. By self-admittance, Kendall states early in this book that it is not a "scholarly treatise." Yet, the reader ends with full appreciation for Kendall's skill in both exegesis and application.

Though striking to find such refreshing insight into Jesus' prayer, it is almost secondary to the pastoral approach of Kendall's writing. He makes multiple appeals to the reader to respond to what Jesus fully intended for His church through the power of prayer. Often quoting from church fathers, past and present, and providing his own personal illustrations, Kendall passionately reinforces his challenge to the reader.

Stressed in the beginning, Kendall sees the Lord's Prayer as the foundation and our own praying as the superstructure built on it. He challenges pastors and laity alike not only to pray the Lord's Prayer for their own personal enrichment, but also to include it in public settings with regularity.

After establishing our reliance and responsibility to prayer, Kendall walks the reader through each phrase of the Lord's Prayer and provides fresh insight for its application. As in other writings of Kendall, he gives an extraordinary call to live a life of forgiveness.

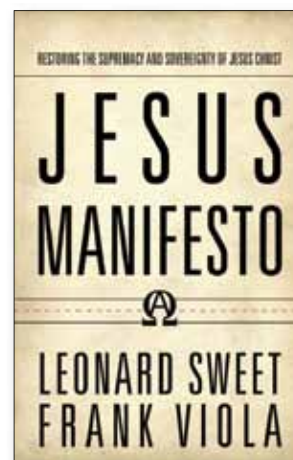
It would not be surprising to find pastors rekindling their appreciation for Jesus' model prayer and in turn leading their congregations into its fresh study as a result of Kendall's work.

—Reviewed by Jeff Peterson,
senior pastor, Central Assembly of God,
Springfield, Missouri.

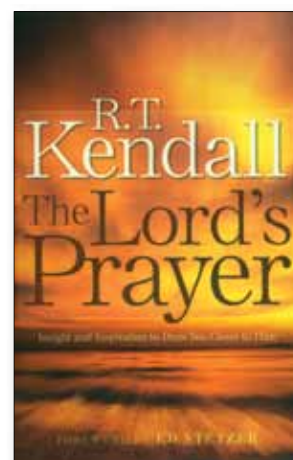
Medical Ethics and the Faith Factor: A Handbook for Clergy and Health-Care Professionals

ROBERT D. ORR, M.D., C.M. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 520 pp., paperback)

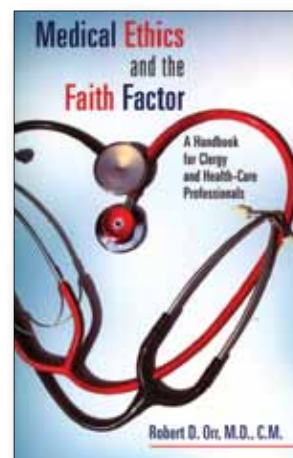
Dr. Robert D. Orr has favored both clergy and the medical community with a well-written handbook to "bring Christian perspectives to bear on the pressing bioethical issues of our day." This volume, the fourth in the series — Critical Issues in Bioethics — draws on Orr's years of



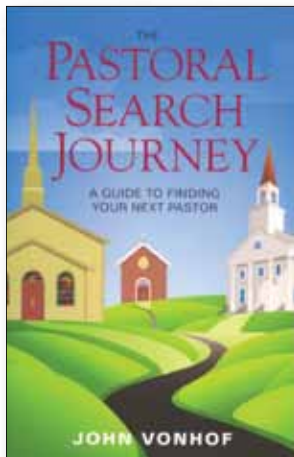
Jesus Manifesto:
Restoring the Supremacy and
Sovereignty of Jesus Christ



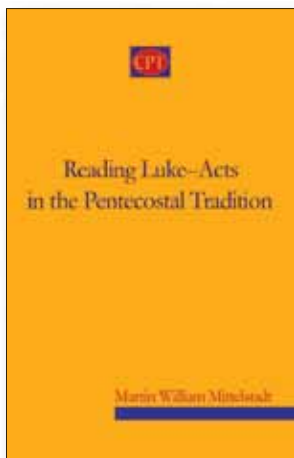
The Lord's Prayer: Insight and
Inspiration to Draw You Closer to Him



Medical Ethics and the Faith Factor:
A Handbook for Clergy and Health
Care Professionals



The Pastoral Search Journey
(A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor)



**Reading Luke-Acts in the
Pentecostal Tradition**

practice as a clinical ethicist to provide a case-study approach highlighting advances in healthcare and the resulting dilemmas when what can be done confronts what ought to be done.

Orr's succinct, but helpful part I sets forth the foundations essential to understanding the cases presented in parts II–IV. As a Christian physician practicing in clinical ethics, he carefully defines and explains both theological ideas that may be alien to many health care professionals as well as medical terms and concepts used by the health-care community often without realizing these words are foreign to most listeners.

In the final section, part V, the focus is the role of the church in the decision and comforting process. This short section is instructive to believers and medical professionals alike. The nonbelieving professional may not be familiar with the biblical principle calling the believing community to be a people living under the guidance and assurance of Holy Scripture while enjoying the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

This reference book will provide valuable insight to both sides of the discussion. It is a discussion that needs to resume, and it must proceed with informed participants, at least some of whom are living *solī Deo gloria*.

— Reviewed by Steven Daugherty, M.D.,
Medical Staff Services, CoxHealth, Springfield, Missouri.

The Pastoral Search Journey (A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor)

JOHN VONHOF (*The Alban Institute, 168 pp., paperback*)

John Vonhof first published *The Pastoral Search Journey* in 1999. The idea for this book came after a long and difficult senior pastor search process that eventually proved to be successful. The updated and revised version published in 2010 takes into account the cultural and church changes that have occurred in just one decade.

Recently, the church I serve as the administrative pastor spent 13 months in a pastoral search process. We used several available resources, but we discovered the same lack of resources as the author. The one resource

we could not find was a start-to-finish resource that would help us manage the entire process. One of the greatest assets of this book is the well-laid-out process that begins in chapter one, “Before the Search Begins,” and ends with “Making the Transition to Your New Pastor.”

Another great tool is what the author calls a Task Cluster. There is a chart at the end of each chapter that lays out the chapter in visual form. It helps the search committee assign tasks, bring focus to a time line, and tie each chapter to the previous ones.

Appendix A lists a number of good resources. Appendices C–H have samples of all the forms, correspondence, and surveys mentioned in the book. A great addition to the book, however, would have been a CD with digital forms, correspondence, and surveys that could be customized for use by any church.

The Pastoral Search Journey has a wealth of information that every search committee needs. It is a great resource for denominational and district leaders to give to churches when a senior pastor resigns.

— Reviewed by Louie Salazar, CCA,
administrative pastor, West County Assembly of God,
Chesterfield, Missouri.

Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition

MARTIN WILLIAM MITTELSTADT (CPT Press, 216 pp., paperback)

Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition provides an objective, narrative discussion — replete with notes — of the rise and development of Pentecostal activity. Mittelstadt, professor at Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, engages in a descriptive perspective, making it useful for a broader theological reading.

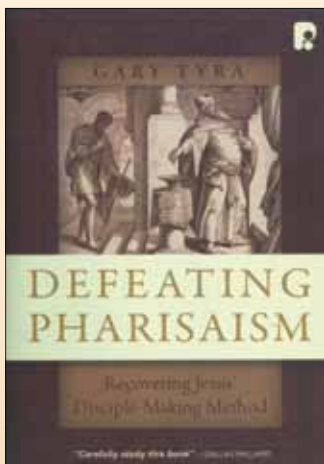
The author deals with Pentecostals and their concerns — and how they are seriously trying to come to grips with these concerns. Its contents provide a straightforward, invigorating, and informative experience, and furnish information on people, hermeneutical methods, and issues.

Mittelstadt includes a thorough bibliography of modern research, mostly by Pentecostals and some charismatics, who have produced

Defeating Pharisaism

GARY TYRA (Paternoster, 272 pp., paperback)

Gary Tyra serves as dean of Vanguard University's School of Religion and is associate professor of biblical and practical theology. He addresses a problem virtually all evangelical churches confront — Pharisaism. Those who hold strong convictions and are genuinely serious about their faith run the risk of slipping into various forms of religion that look like the evils that beset the Pharisees in Jesus' day.



Tyra specifies the following as dimensions of the Pharisee syndrome: egoism (self-righteousness and spiritual arrogance), dogmatism and sectarianism, super-spirituality/hyperpiety, traditionalism/ritualism, legalism/separatism, judgmentalism, pugilism (persecuting opponents), trivialism, and formalism/hypocrisy. This book not only traces what Jesus encountered in first-century Judaism, but it recognizes manifestations of these disorders in the contemporary church.

The book is well-organized, clearly and persuasively written. Supporting documentation adds a degree of scholarly credibility. The first three chapters comprise a section titled "Understanding Pharisaism." Here the author traces the history of the Pharisees and places them in the context of Jesus' encounters with them in the first century. The heart of the book is the second section, "Understanding the Sermon on the Mount." The crux of the message is that legalistic law-keeping, the veneer of religion, is at direct cross purposes with the life of faith taught by Jesus.

The third section, "Using the Sermon on the Mount to Defeat Pharisaism," is an attempt to show practical ways of making true disciples in the contemporary church.

Leaders and disciples, scholars and parishioners will appreciate this book. The author addresses a major issue in our churches today with practical pointers for producing genuine disciples of Christ.

— Reviewed by William W. Menzies, Ph.D.,
longtime Assemblies of God educator and missions consultant, Springfield, Missouri.



materials on the core of Pentecostalism — Spirit baptism, Luke-Acts, and especially Acts 2.

Of particular interest are suggestions for the future from a variety of Pentecostals. They give new insights on social justice/ethics, suffering and persecution, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, globalization, and Luke-Acts in a postmodern age. Mittelstadt notes glaring gaps that Pentecostals need to examine and things that need more work. He provides trajectories for the 21st century. The author also lists Pentecostal commentaries and pastoral tools.

Mittelstadt importantly notes the chasm that Pentecostals need to bridge between practitioners and the academy. Hopefully, *Reading Luke-Acts* will encourage the people of God to work to overcome this chasm and enrich and empower their mission.

This is a must read for anyone doing research on Pentecostals. Outsiders and insiders will learn from this book.

— Reviewed by Benny C. Aker, Ph.D.,
professor emeritus, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Missouri.

Croatian Pastors Grateful for *Enrichment*

"Duhovno Vrelo (Enrichment journal in Croatian) is stimulating material for all pastoral workers in Croatia," says Pastor Daniel Berkovic. "It challenges and constantly educates them. I hope the work and publishing of it will be able to continue for Croatia."

Enrichment is available in 13 languages in print or digital format, thanks to a cooperative effort between Life Publishers, a ministry of Assemblies of God World Missions, and the U.S. *Enrichment* national office



Goran Punda (left) works with Life Publishers to coordinate the production of *Duhovno Vrelo* in Croatian. With him is Croatian pastor and presbyter, Daniel Berkovic.

Thousands of overseas pastors now have access to special editions of this quarterly Pentecostal publication produced in Bengali, Czech, Croatian, French, German, Hindi, Hungarian, Malayalam, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Tamil, and Ukrainian.

Croatian pastors are grateful for *Enrichment* because the articles each issue features are written by Pentecostal pastors for Pentecostal pastors. Pastors are encouraged and uplifted by this biblically based teaching material.

Prior to the 1991–95 war in Croatia that devastated its people and economy, biblical resources were more readily available to pastors and laypeople. But today, publications like *Duhovno Vrelo* in the Croatian language are scarce.

"Life Publishers is grateful to U.S. pastors, churches, and individuals who recognize the importance of placing this valuable training tool in the hands of overseas pastors and financially support the project," says Guy Highfill, director of Life Publishers. "Providing this publication quarterly to thousands of overseas pastors is a huge commitment for us." To learn how you can be a part of helping with this need, visit www.LifePublishers.org.

materials to meeting physical and basic healthcare needs of children.

At the culmination of his career, champion veteran missionary Bernhard Johnson of Brazil said, "If I could do it all over again, I'd reach the children." Many people in Assemblies of God leadership all over the world — superintendents, pastors, Bible college professors — have one thing in common: they were reached as children.

Children have hearts open to receive the gospel. Some of the greatest seed sown by missionaries across the globe has landed on the fertile soil of children. This year's emphasis, "The Year of the Child," takes us back to Jesus' great statement, "Let the children come to me" (Matthew 19:14).

Rx for Change

HealthCare Ministries introduces a new project — Rx for Change — that will help your church get involved with giving toward medical missions. Churches and their members can write a prescription to change someone's life through HCM by taking an empty prescription vial and filling it with 28 quarters — \$7. That is all it takes to treat just one person on an HCM outreach.

Churches can send the funds they collect to HealthCare Ministries, 521 W. Lynn St., Springfield, MO 65802.

For more information and a free template of labels to make your own Rx for Change bottle, visit www.healthcareministries.org and click on the Resources link.



Students at South Pacific Bible College in Fiji receive a copy of the *Fire Bible*.

Fire Bible Global Study Edition

"Today is better than Christmas!" said Adrian Panapasa, a student at South Pacific Bible College in Fiji, when he received a copy of the *Fire Bible Global Study Edition* in international English last spring. "This is the first new Bible I have ever had!" Adrian and all of the students at South Pacific Bible College received a copy of this Pentecostal study Bible — complete with notes/commentary on how to live a Spirit-filled life, 77 biblical theme articles, a concordance, and biblical maps and charts.

Adrian is one of about 375 million people worldwide who speak English as a second language. The Assemblies of God Bible Alliance has identified at least 65 countries and territories where English is widely spoken, and the *Fire Bible Global Study Edition* can be a great blessing. People living in these places may never have the *Fire Bible* in their first language because their small numbers prohibit a costly *Fire Bible* translation project. But many of them will be able to read and study it in their second (or third) language of international English. Bible Alliance's challenge now is to fund the distribution cost of this study Bible to those places.

In addition to the *Fire Bible Global Study Edition*, six more *Fire Bible* language editions were launched in 2010: Thai (Thailand); Czech (Czech Republic); Turkish (Turkey and Middle East); Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Nigeria). Visit www.BibleAlliance.org to see the list of the 35 *Fire Bible* language editions now in print and the nearly 30 more editions in development.

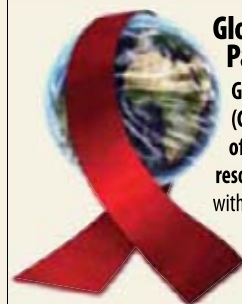
2011 Year of the Child

Assemblies of God World Missions has declared 2011 as "Year of the Child" in an effort to implement new and enhanced efforts to reach children with the gospel and to minister to their needs. The current AGWM theme is "Every Generation." The YOTC theme, "No Child Without," is the hallmark of this endeavor. The goal is to see no child without Christ or without the essentials of life.

Each region of the world is working with national churches to raise awareness of the child, and focus on the value of reaching children. Leaders are looking at ways to meet the needs of the whole child, and working to make resources and training for children's ministry accessible to churches everywhere.

Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge (BGMC) will provide funding for these projects through a special "Year of the Child" offering taken May 1, 2011.

These projects will range from Sunday School and other discipleship



Global AIDS Partnership

Global AIDS Partnership (GAP) is an Assemblies of God World Missions resource and response team with representatives from all regions of the world.

GAP assists missionaries and national church partners to engage in HIV ministry and provides resources for those ministering to people with HIV/AIDS. GAP helps ministries share resources, personnel, and also has created tools, such as a Bible study, that increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and prepare people to pray and minister to those with HIV/AIDS.

How can Global AIDS Partnership serve you? By:

- providing complete, easy-to-implement training materials to begin an HIV/AIDS ministry.
- offering training seminars for missionaries and nationals preparing for HIV/AIDS ministry.
- providing medical and technical assistance to missionaries and nationals currently involved in HIV/AIDS ministry.
- consulting with regions to assess the needs and determine the most appropriate HIV/AIDS response.
- serving as a resource center for HIV/AIDS information and materials.

For more information, contact GAP at: 202 East Commercial Street, Springfield, MO 65802; 417-866-3500; e-mail, webmaster@globalaidspartnership.org, or website, www.globalaidspartnership.org.



Photos.com

Project 10Million

Is Internet evangelism contributing to the "flattening" of our world? Project 10Million is delivering the gospel once every 25 seconds, 24/7 from one of 212 countries. Volunteers follow up with discipleship of new believers within 48 hours.

Dr. George M. Flattery, president and founder of Network211, remembers the day God spoke into his heart a vision for reaching 10 million people using the Internet. Project 10Million embodies that vision. He states, "Over 1.7 million people in 24 months have viewed the gospel. Results show a 150 percent increase when we compare 2009 with an average of 58,475 people per month viewing Network211 with the August 2010, monthly average of 90,560 people."

Here are some interesting facts from August 2010:

- 155 unique visitors viewed our Vietnamese language version.
- 555 unique visitors viewed our Farsi language version, including people from Iran.
- 674 unique visitors viewed our Indonesian language version.

Here are some interesting facts since October 2008:

- 1,849 discipleship connections came from people who are from the Arabian Peninsula since our launch. This includes 906 commitments for salvation and 418 recommitments.
- unique visitors from Iran — 2,362; Qatar — 4,070; Saudi Arabia — 14,520; United Arab Emirates — 24,136.
- unique visitors from the 10/40 window are about 270,000 people with 8 percent with an evangelism response and 3 percent with a discipleship connection.

- unique visitors from unusual locations: Tuvalu — 19; Greenland — 39; Liechtenstein — 8; Cook Islands — 55.
- Approximately 10 percent of all unique visitors come from the United States.

"During August 2010, it cost 19 cents per person to deliver the gospel over the Internet to anyone who was searching and found one of our websites," states Dr. Keith Sorbo, vice president of technology. He further says, "Recent additions to staff should continue to help us push down the cost in these economic troubling times as the challenge for world evangelism continues."

You can view the gospel presentations at www.JourneyAnswers.com or www.Who_Jesus_is.com. Network211's secure messaging allows one of our 300 volunteer connectors to communicate with new believers. Each connector has extensive digital resources available for discipleship. The goal is to direct new converts to a church where possible and connect to www.GlobalChristianCenter.com.

Your church can become involved. We offer free evangelism links for your website at www.Project10Million.com. Click on "Link Your Site." For more information, contact ctouchstone@network211.com, or call 417-866-6767, ext. 61.

Introducing Global Christian

A new online church has entered the Internet marketplace: GlobalChristianCenter.com. Dr. George M. Flattery, founder and president of Network211, states that after 10 years in development, "We now have a tool to help churches by providing trusted content for their website, and empowering them to have an online campus."

Utilizing 21st-century technology, Network 211's staff has built GCC as a state-of-the-art online church. GCC's purpose is to mentor a new generation of Internet savvy believers who will serve the needs of those coming to Christ through Network211's website. Discipleship

connections since October 2010 now exceed 45,000 people.

Any church can place GCC's content on its website. The content will have the "look and feel" of the local church. A part of Network211's mission is "to enable our partners to have a Web ministry utilizing our services and resources," states Carley M. Touchstone, director of development.

On GCC's website you will find:

- An inspirational online weekly church service including special music and a 12-minute sermon from Dr. George M. Flattery.
 - The Jesus Path. This includes digital resources to guide a person from salvation to Christian service. A church can use The Jesus Path as an online campus to train church members.
 - Trusted biblical content for all ages. This includes an assortment of special-interest items for men, women, singles, college, youth, and children. There are even games for the kids.
 - Ministry Resources, providing church and administrative resources, Bible, theology, and sermon materials.
- To learn more about GCC, and how to become a partner, visit GlobalChristianCenter.com and click on "Source Syndication."

Contact Network211 at info.network211.com or by phone at 417-866-6767.

MEGA Sports Camp 2011 Theme

Gospel Publishing House reveals the MEGA Sports Camp theme for 2011: Go the Distance. Churches nationwide have used the do-it-yourself MEGA



Sports Camp kits to successfully reach their communities. *Outreach Magazine* declared it "Outreach Resource of the Year" for 2005 and 2009. In fact, churches usually enjoy a 51 percent guest rate and 20 percent salvation response.

Churches choose to do MEGA Sports Camp outreaches as a VBS alternative, a neighborhood blast, back-to-school kick-off, or a Saturday day camp.

Geared for first through sixth grade, MSC curriculum lets kids and leaders choose from four sports: soccer, basketball, baseball, and cheerleading. Kids get on-the-field experience and skill building.

Each session includes a group Rally Time where kids enjoy interactive worship and Bible times that help them apply lessons from the playing field to life. MEGA Sports Camp Go the Distance features Bible stories about Paul. The theme verse is, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

(continued on next page)

BGMC Releases New E-LIFE Series



BGMC announces a new E-LIFE series that enables leaders to teach elementary-aged students to witness to and mentor other kids at school or in their community.

With the help of U.S. missionary James Hall, BGMC produces a new *Go 3-D Discoveries* series

that offers a leader and student guide that can be downloaded free at www.elife.ag.org.

"The *Go 3-D Discoveries* provides easy-to-apply activities that can be retaught by a child to another classmate or friend," says Marshall Bruner, compassion ministries coordinator for BGMC. "Coupled with the many other activities E-LIFE offers on its website, BGMC challenges kids across the nation to be the new generation of missionaries to their schools."

The *3-D Discoveries* helps students mentor other kids about topics such as "Jesus Paid Your Bill" (salvation), "Learning Your ABC's" (steps in sharing the plan of salvation), "Call Home" (how to communicate with God), "God's Road Map" (the Bible), and "Making Right Choices." Each lesson includes handouts that provide fun opportunities for kids to share their faith and mentor other students.

To view the *Go 3-D Discoveries*, visit www.elife.ag.org/invest.



In addition, stories about real athletes, like baseball player Rick Ankiel, Pittsburgh Steeler Rocky Bleir, and Olympic diver Laura Wilkinson, seal the Bible lessons in kids' minds.

For more information, visit www.megasportscamp.com or call 1.800.641.4310.

Sustain Hope

Sustain Hope is a Christ-centered, best practice approach to improve lives through community initiated, sustainable solutions (International Community Development). Sharing the message of Jesus Christ consistently and compassionately alongside the local church will impact lives spiritually, physically, and socially, providing a holistic response to the felt needs within individuals and their communities.

Partnering with local missionaries and responding to the identified initiatives of national churches and communities, Sustain Hope provides on-site consulting, research, training, assessment, program design, and evaluation.

Sustain Hope believes they will need to utilize local resources effectively and efficiently through available technology for individuals and communities in impoverished areas to develop sufficiently, be self-sustaining, and be healthy. This includes:

- using alternative fuels.
- making the best use of limited land for gardening and wide-scale land use for agriculture/aquaculture.
- raising livestock to provide for family needs both nutritionally and economically.
- identifying appropriate water sources including the most resourceful ways to clean water.

- addressing sanitation and other environmental issues that will assist in alleviating diarrhea, malaria, and other life-threatening diseases.

Sustain Hope is an integral part of International Ministries, Assemblies of God World Missions

For more information, contact Sustain Hope, P.O. Box 8374, Springfield, MO 65801; 417-866-1292; Web, www.sustainhope.org, or e-mail, info@sustainhope.org.



Teacher of the Year Nominations

You have some very important people serving alongside you. Have you taken the time to express your thanks to them? One way to thank your teachers is to send in your nomination for Sunday School Teacher of the Year. Since 1995, the National Sunday School Office has awarded the Billie Davis Award for Excellence in Christian Education. Why not send in your nomination today? Go to www.discipleship.ag.org/TOTY and fill out a nomination form.

Faculty Seminar

The Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education will host the AG Faculty Seminar, June 28–30, 2011, at Evangel University, Springfield, Mo.

Participants in this year's seminar will come from the following disciplines: Bible/theology, church history, deaf ministries, leadership studies, ministry/missions, religious studies, student ministries, and science. The Alliance has also invited college presidents, chief academic officers, chief financial officers, and vice presidents/directors of advancement.

The 3-day event provides opportunity to network with colleagues from other AG schools and allows participants to exchange ideas related to their academic disciplines.

Seminarians Conference

The Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education will host the AG Seminarians Conference July 10–22, 2011, at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Mo.

The Alliance has invited seminary students across the country who are members of our Fellowship but attend non-Assemblies of God seminaries. This event, sponsored by the Executive Presbytery and The Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education, serves to expose students to Pentecostal scholarship they may not experience at their seminaries and encourage them to maintain their relationships with the Assemblies of God.

Exposure to Pentecostal scholarship will take place as students participate in classes with AGTS professors. Encouragement to maintain relationships with the Fellowship will occur through interaction with members of the Executive Presbytery and other ministry leaders.

The General Council of the Assemblies of God strongly believes in educating our young people and investing in the next generation. The General Council underwrites the cost of books, tuition, and room and board. ☺

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