

Winter
2014



A Journal for Church of God Ministries

engage

IN THIS ISSUE

Small Church, Big Vision

A Call to Brokenness

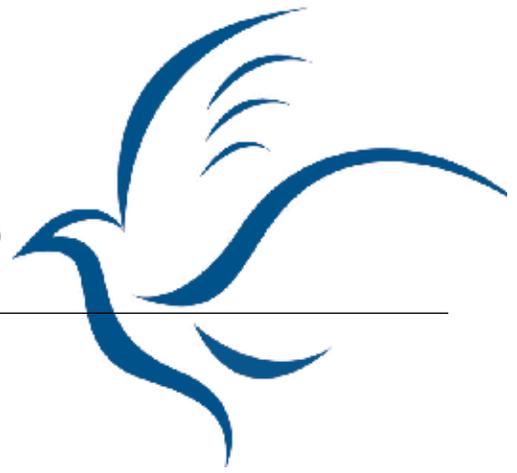
Change That Fits

Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts

Preaching Through Advent

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Vital Cogs in the CoG Wheel

RECENTLY CONTRIBUTED a chapter to a book scheduled for release next year entitled, “Faith of Our Mothers.” It is a follow up to “Faith of Our Fathers,” a book published by Pathway, which featured tributes to Church of God fathers by their sons and daughters. In the tribute to my mother’s ministry I talked about how our family planted seven churches together when my dad, the late Dr. Robert Fisher, was overseer. Those churches rarely ran over 50 people and I’m sure the finances received certainly didn’t support the family.

This scenario—families pastoring small churches—defines the majority of the congregations in the Church of God. Many times it means whoever is the pastor, whether it be mom or dad, must be bi-vocational.

Several articles in this issue address small church challenges and/or triumphs. There is also an announcement in the Church of God Highlights section about the new Vital Initiative, a ministry started by a small church pastor and embraced by the leadership of the Church of God.

The life blood of the Church of God is the smaller church. We honor them for their contributions because without them, this movement would not be what it is today. ■

Engage journal is published in the interest of providing resources for Church of God pastors.

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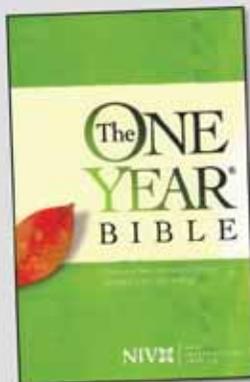
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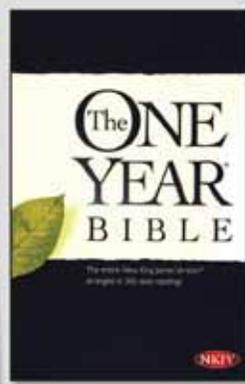
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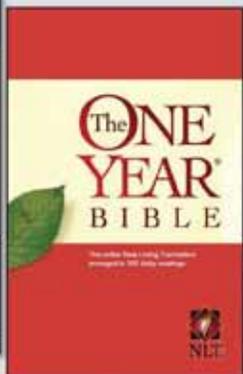
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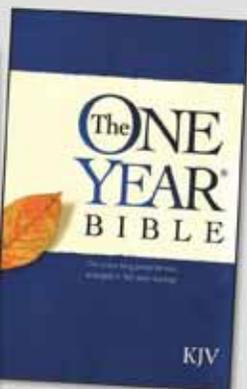
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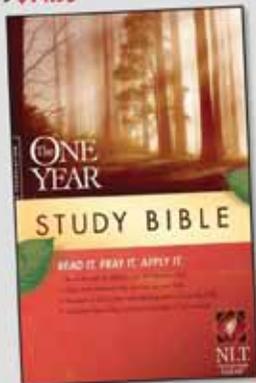
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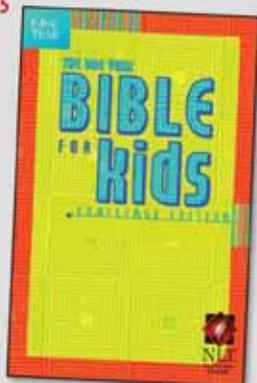
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Park West Church NextGen service

Two Tennessee Churches Model NEXTGEN MINISTRY

TWO TENNESSEE CHURCH of God congregations—Park West in Knoxville and North Cleveland in Cleveland—are models for churches that want to reach out to the next generation, which is often referred to as NextGen.

Both churches hold separate NextGen services, although both pastors emphasize that all people are welcomed in the contemporary-style services. And, many people evidently feel that welcome, since the typical NextGen service at either church is a mix of age groups ranging from babies to white-haired elders.

Mitch Maloney is lead pastor at North Cleveland; Gerald McGinnis is lead pastor at Park West. North Cleveland's NextGen ministry is led by Craig Mosgrove, and Jeremy McGinnis, son of Pastor Gerald McGinnis, leads the NextGen ministry at Park West.

The lead pastors are both long-term. Pastor McGinnis is the founding pastor of Park West and has served for 33 years. Pastor Maloney has been North Cleveland's pastor for 20 years.

Both pastors express a burden for reaching younger people—especially the Millennials, who will be the leaders for the next generation. And, both men admit that worship services in the traditional fashion may not appeal to younger people.

As Pastor Maloney notes, "About six years ago, I woke up one day and realized the great changes that have taken place in the culture, the country, and the church. So we began to move toward a multigenerational service. If we don't do something to reach the Millennials, we will lose them."

Pastor McGinnis says, "The mission of our church is to reach everyone we possibly can.

I realize that I may not relate to the younger generation as well as someone nearer their age. Jeremy will attract more young people than I will. So I have to ask myself whether I am growing a church or growing the Kingdom.”

NORTH CLEVELAND'S NEXTGEN SERVICE

North Cleveland's NextGen service is called Resurgence, but Craig Mosgrove is quick to point out that the name is really North Cleveland's theme for this period. “We are not building a ministry separate from the church,” Mosgrove says. “We are one church together to reap the harvest.”

Pastor Maloney notes, “We are not two churches, but one church headed in the same direction with two different styles. Our intention is to reach this generation without offending the older generations.”

The North Cleveland NextGen service begins at 9:30 a.m. in the main sanctuary. Typically, the lights are low on the main floor, but the stage is illuminated to bring attention to the worship team. The music is loud and guitar-driven. Because Millennials are visually oriented, videos are used extensively for testimonies and announcements. The music is contemporary and songs are projected on large screens.

Preaching is done in a narrative style. Pastor Mosgrove says, “The narrative style connects with Millennials. The gospel message is the same. It's just presented in a way that connects with our audience.”

PARK WEST'S NEXTGEN SERVICE

Park West's NextGen service, which is called Cultivate, meets in the church gymnasium at 11 a.m. while the regular morning service is going on in Park West's main sanctuary.

Park West holds multiple services on Sunday. The church has a full-time pastor for each age group and two Hispanic congregations meet at the church. Two services are held in the main sanctuary.

Park West's NextGen ministry met in a theater for two years. The ministry was known as Turkey Creek Community Church and was led by Jeremy McGinnis. However, after two years the limitations of rented facilities caused that ministry to close. But the closing of that outreach didn't lessen Pastor McGinnis' desire to reach the younger generation.

Two years ago, Pastor McGinnis opened the door to Jeremy's office and posed a question: “Would you like to begin a service in the gymnasium?” Jeremy immediately answered, “Yes!” Jeremy McGinnis says, “When we closed Turkey Creek Church, God told me to come home and not compete, but complete.”

Within a few weeks, the first NextGen service was held. The typical service in the gymnasium opens with a lowering of the main floor lighting so that the lighting emphasis is focused on the worship team on the stage. Here, too, the music is loud—mostly guitars. The songs are contemporary.

Unlike a service held in a prepared sanctuary, Jeremy McGinnis and his team must set up the gymnasium for church every Saturday evening. Jeremy says, “Our setup team has become like a family. We meet every Saturday evening to cover the gym floor and set up folding chairs for the Sunday morning service. Then we usually have pizza and fellowship afterward.”

“There is a lot of freedom in the gym,” Jeremy notes. “We have a small church feel in a large church. But we are not a separate church. We are one church—one body—empowering

people to become what God planned them to be. Cultivate is a venue for gifts and talents to be used."

GETTING STARTED IN NEXTGEN MINISTRY

For pastors wanting to start ministering to NextGens, both Pastor Maloney and Pastor McGinnis encourage churches to make room for the next generation. "If we are going to reach the Millennials, we have to create a venue in which the worship style is agreeable to them," says Pastor Maloney. "A pastor must be a visionary leader. A church does not have to be stagnant and dying. I decided several years ago that I will mentor as many young men as I can for the rest of my ministry."

Pastor McGinnis states, "Insecurity and selfishness is costing us. Ministry cannot grow if the pastor is dominating. We must pray and release ministry."

Craig Mosgrove says, "Mutual submission is necessary. Ephesians 4:7 tells us, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (NKJV). We must release and empower the gifts God has given to the body."

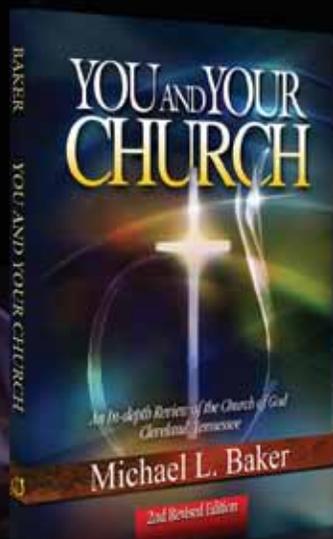
Both pastoral teams state a willingness to assist other pastors in establishing a NextGen ministry.

When is the best time to start a NextGen ministry? Now! As Jeremy McGinnis says, "Don't wait until everything is perfect. Hear from God; trust God and obey Him. Be who God has called you to be." ■

YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

You and Your Church has been revised to detail the current structure of the church and the exciting challenges it faces in modern times.

You and Your Church helps Church of God members discover who they are, what they believe, and how they can effectively fulfill the call and commission of Christ. It additionally serves as an informational resource and program of instruction for those who desire to unite with the church in membership.



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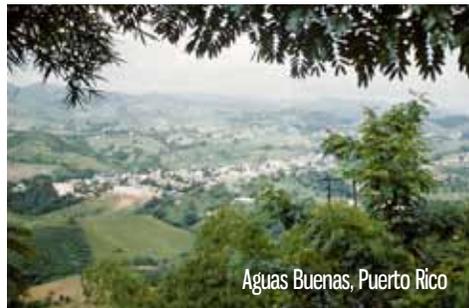
A Church Empowered by the SPIRIT in a Small Community

by MAIDALYS IRIZARRY VILLEGAS

TODAY'S SOCIETY has been defined as one where there's an abundance of questions, but few answers. Most of us grew up in a church that is not appealing to some people. Therefore, we face the challenge of how to attract people to the church. Many programs have been designed to deal with this issue in the local church, and through Christian radio and television. The truth is the results have not been as expected.

On the other hand, many communities continue to suffer from the onslaught of social ills, moral decadence, and the global economic meltdown. In the midst of the constant emergence of new problems, people are wondering who can help them. The trust in governmental structures has been lost. As the family disintegrates, the generation that is rising before our eyes is crying out for something more than what has already been heard and lived.

When we take a look at the pages of the Bible, we are confronted with the experience of the early church. Their experience had its



genesis in the Day of Pentecost. The occasion of the traditional celebration became the stage for the outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit. The fulfillment of the words of Jesus, given in the Gospel of Luke (24:49), was notorious to those present at the celebration and to the ones who listened from afar. The Father was fulfilling His promise, and the disciples were endued with power from on high. The consequences were swift: boldness to proclaim the gospel, conversions, discipleship, unity, and passion for the mission.

We believe that for the Church of this century to be relevant to its community, it needs the Holy Spirit. In the town of Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico, in a rural area, my local church decided to embark on a deliberate search for the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sole purpose of becoming more assertive to the needs of the community. Meetings and dynamics of prayer, fasting, prayer vigils, and congregational Bible study stoked the fire. As it was during the time of Acts, the Holy Spirit has come upon us. It has transformed our vision, programs, and even the name of the place in which the temple is built. Years ago, that place was known as "Cidrita Gallerin," a space used for cockfights and the consumption of alcohol, among other things that kept the residents of the community away from God. Years later, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, that place

is known as the Church of God, Ríos de Agua Viva (Rivers of Living Water.) The river of the Spirit flows for salvation, freedom, affirmation, and the restoration of the lives that once were under the dominion of sin.

The Holy Spirit has enlarged our vision about the purpose of the church in the community. Today, we affirm that we are the church of the open door: a big house where all can fit. We exist to exalt God and serve the community. We reach people and integrate them into the community of faith, teaching them to become like Jesus Christ. In practical terms, the municipal government, communal organizations, and the residents know us as a church interested in their well-being and available to serve the community. We have updated our evangelization through two ministries: "Connecting with the Community" and "Love in the Street." These are intended to reach the people who can come to the temple.

The Holy Spirit has also changed the proclamation of the Word. Now, our preaching is focused on the proposal of the Father through Jesus for all who believe. Our lips proclaim the good news, that which instills faith and hope. We understand that we don't have to offend human dignity in order for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction about the need of a Savior. Similarly, the proclamation has been adapted to reach each of the groups represented in the church, and thus to meet the needs of children, adolescents, young people, men, women, and seniors.

The work of the Spirit has resulted in many of our guests coming to the faith. To receive them, we renovated the programs and strategies in order to spend some time getting to know the new converts, consolidating them and placing them in the path to biblical training

and leadership. We called it the "Training Route RAV," a process whereby the believers are formed since the moment of their salvation until they become leaders or members of a ministry. The Holy Spirit has transformed the task of making disciples, framing it in a process of acquiring biblical knowledge, while at the same time, being trained for a specific ministry in which the new believer will serve. On that route, a spiritual infant becomes a man or a woman who knows his/her talents, is trained for spiritual warfare, and is convinced of the mission of making new disciples.

It is not surprising that our passion for the lost increases every day. We want others to enjoy the blessing that we have been granted. By seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit, we have become a missionary post; while at the same time, we continue to develop a Pentecostal spirituality.

We are a church that is 35 years old that is renewing itself with sustainable growth. As Jesus taught in the synagogue, we are convinced that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the good news brings forth salvation, and the expansion of the kingdom of God issues the favorable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). This success has been built on the investiture of power for an effective service and on the enjoyment of the gifts of the Spirit, which are for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7.) The active presence of the Holy Spirit has transformed our reality; we are witness of the power of the Holy Spirit. ■

Maidalys Irizarry Villegas is a minister of the Mission Board Church of God in Puerto Rico, and a member of the Iglesia de Dios Ríos de Agua Viva, in Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico. This article has been translated from Spanish by Deborah Enid Ortiz, Department of Hispanic Ministries.

by JONATHAN STONE



Preaching Through ADVENT

FOR CENTURIES, untold millions of Christians have allowed the Christian calendar to provide the basic rhythm of their spiritual direction throughout the year. As Pentecostals, we have typically ignored this rich tradition. For the most part, it seems we walked away from the Christian calendar because it was perceived to be part of what we might call “dead religion”—the very thing from which early Pentecostals were seeking to find deliverance and renewal. However, while *traditionalism* brings about spiritual death, *tradition* brings about spiritual life. As Jaroslav Pelikan once observed, “Tradition is the living faith of dead people, but traditionalism is the dead faith of living people.”

Perhaps it was good and necessary for early Pentecostals to do away with things like the Christian calendar. Or, perhaps it was a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, throwing out the tradition with the tradition-

alism. Whether or not the Christian calendar should have been abandoned in the first place, Pentecostal churches are now rediscovering the deep spiritual wells that are found within it. This is especially true during the seasons of Lent and Advent, both of which lead up to the two most attended church services of the year—Easter Sunday and the Sunday closest to Christmas. As we are entering the Advent season now, I would like to offer five reasons why you should consider emphasizing themes of Advent in your sermons and services this year.

First, focusing on Advent gives you the opportunity to proclaim the true message of the holiday season. There is a saying that goes, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” As cliché as it may sound, it really is the truth. The word *Advent* comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” Advent is the season where we not only remember and celebrate that Jesus came to earth two thousand years

ago, but also that He will come again soon. Preaching on Advent themes throughout the holiday season gives a church an opportunity to proclaim that beautiful truth.

Second, focusing on Advent allows for more participation from the members of the congregation. One area where you can increase participation is in the Sunday morning service. It is common throughout Advent to light a candle each week at the beginning of the service. Along with the candle lighting, there are special biblical themes each week, as well as specific accompanying Scriptures. Each week you can have a different person or couple light the candle, do the reading, and/or pray a prayer.

Third, focusing on Advent allows you to maximize the impact that the content of your sermons has on the lives of the members of the church. With many of the individuals in our congregations we only get the opportunity to speak into their lives once a week. All too often a beautiful experience in worship or powerful message in preaching is almost completely forgotten by the next day. While focusing on Advent, you can send home daily devotions that members can do at home as a family, which tie into the themes of the sermon each week. You can teach about the symbolism of the advent wreath and each of its candles, and encourage families to do a nightly candle lighting as well. You might be surprised how excited the members of the church get about Advent. What other time of year will all of the members of the church be so willing to participate in the themes of the sermons each week?

Fourth, the themes of Advent are rich and beautiful. The theme of the first Sunday

is *Hope*. The readings and common biblical passages come from those Old Testament scriptures where the people of God are anticipating the coming of God's Messiah. The theme of the second Sunday is *Peace*. The readings concern the birth of Christ and the prophecies that foresaw it. The theme of the third Sunday is *Joy*. This service is often focused on "stirring up joy," and commonly uses the joy of the shepherds and the biblical instruction to "rejoice always" (Philippians 4:4). The theme of the fourth Sunday is *Love*. This service typically focuses on the announcement of Christ's birth. If there is a fifth candle in the Advent wreath, it is called the Christ Candle. It may be lit during the fourth Sunday service or during a Christmas Eve service, if you decide to do one.

Fifth, focusing on Advent allows a church and its members to experience a deeper connection to the rest of the body of Christ. This Advent season there will literally be billions of Christians around the world celebrating the hope, peace, joy, and love that we are to receive, proclaim and enact in our lives and in the lives of those around us. This is something that has been practiced from generation to generation within the body of Christ for many centuries.

These are just a few of the many benefits that churches experience by taking the time to incorporate the themes of Advent into their weekly services. I hope and pray that you will prayerfully consider doing that this year. Even if Advent has already begun, it is not too late to pull these ideas into your church this year. By participating in such a rich and beautiful tradition, each member of your church can begin to experience the grandeur of eternity that Advent is meant to bring. ■

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CHANGE

That Fits

by RYAN
STIGILE

EVERY LOCAL CHURCH is beautifully unique. Unlike any other in the world, each is driven by different passions, values, and principles, and each church reaches an entirely different group of people. Yet too often, instead of building ideas for change that are tailored to their own identity, churches transplant methods that were originally built for something different. The logic is simple, "If it worked for them, it will work for us!" But like a younger brother wearing hand-me-downs all his life, these churches continually try on new ideas that do not fit their size, style, or place in time.

If you want to make change that lasts, you have to make change that fits. Change that fits is built from the inside, not copied from the outside. While this process is longer on the front-end, it leads to solutions that will carry your organization much further into the future. Consider these steps:

1. Identify YOUR Problems

Why do you need to change? General opinions about the problems of the modern church are very broad; in fact, they are a dime a dozen. Additionally, if you have spent five minutes around your specific church, you probably have an opinion about what is wrong with it. Instead of listening to outside and underdeveloped opinions, spend some time understanding the true problems of your organization.

Often, what initially comes to mind is only a symptom of something deeper. Ask God to reveal the true necessary areas of improvement.

2. Identify YOUR Strengths

What are you good at? When analyzing problems, it is easy to develop a highly negative outlook. Regardless of the current problems you are facing, your church is still making a significant impact. Taking time to identify your strengths allows you the chance to reframe your outlook. This balanced perspective of problems and strengths provides the hope necessary to sustain the change process.

3. Identify YOUR Needs

List your problems and strengths in columns next to one another in front of your leadership team. How can you begin using your strengths to solve your problems? Get creative in the ways that you use them. After exhausting your strengths, determine what else is truly needed to move forward. You might require a new skill set, specific data, or an objective opinion. Whatever your need, identify and acquire it.

4. Identify YOUR Solution

Equipped with a clear understanding of your problems, strengths, and satisfied needs, you can create the change that fits. Instead of trying on ideas made for someone else, your church will be able to move forward with an organic solution most appropriate to its identity. And just like your favorite shirt, you'll still be wearing it many years down the road...

...Why? Because it fits *you*. ■

Ryan Stigile serves as the Strategic Analyst for Mount Paran Church in Atlanta, Ga.

Christian Teens Abandon Faith BECAUSE of Youth Groups, Not DESPITE Them

A NEW STUDY might reveal why a majority of Christian teens abandon their faith upon high school graduation. Some time ago, Christian pollster George Barna documented that 61 percent of today's twenty-somethings, who had been church-ed at one point during their teen years, are now spiritually disengaged. They do not attend church, read their Bible, or pray.

According to a new five-week, three-question national survey sponsored by the National

Center for Family-Integrated Churches (NCFIC), the youth group itself is the problem. Fifty-five percent of American Christians are concerned with modern youth ministry, because it's too shallow and too entertainment focused, resulting in an inability to train mature believers. But, even if church youth groups had the gravitas of Dallas Theological Seminary, 36 percent of today's believers are convinced that youth groups themselves are not even biblical.



The survey participants were among the 4 million believers who saw the Web banner on America's top 14 Christian websites, including ChristianPost.com, WorldMag.com, BibleStudyTools.com, ChristianRadio.com, Christianity.com, Crosscards.com, Crosswalk.com, Godtube.com, GodVine.com, iBelieve.com, Jesus.org, OnePlace.com, LightSource.com, and ReligionToday.com. Plus, an additional 290,000 Christians received a direct email invitation to participate.

After answering the three-questions at www.YouthGroupSurvey.com, each survey participant received NCFIC Director Scott Brown's e-book titled, *Weed in the Church: How a Culture of Age Segregation is Destroying the Younger Generation, Fragmenting the Family and Harming Church*, as well as access to the 50-minute-long documentary titled, *Divided: Is Modern Youth Ministry Multiplying or Dividing the Church?* (*Divided* has been viewed by 200,000 people.)

Adam McManus, a spokesman for the NCFIC, is not surprised by the church's deep concerns about youth groups.

"Today's church has created peer dependency," said McManus. "The inherent result of youth groups is that teenagers in the church are focused on their peers, not their parents or their pastors. It's a foreign sociology that leads to immaturity, a greater likelihood of sexual activity, drug experimentation, and a rejection of the authority of the Word of God. Proverbs 13:20 says, 'He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm' (NASB). The result is that the youth stumble, they can't see beyond their noses, and spiritual adolescence is prolonged well into adulthood. It's crippling the body of Christ. That's why it's time to return to the

biblical paradigm and throw out the youth group structure entirely."

Here are the results:

1. Are church "youth group" programs a biblical way to reach young people?
 - 37% said, "No."
 - 36% said, "Yes."
 - 26% said, "It's complicated."
2. Does modern youth ministry concern you?
 - 14% said, "Yes, we are losing our kids, and it's clearly not working to train mature believers."
 - 9% said, "Yes, it's too shallow and entertainment focused."
 - 55% said, "Yes, because of both A and B."
 - 22% said, "No. It's not perfect, but it's striving to relevantly communicate the gospel."
3. Does the Bible give clear direction and boundaries for discipling youth in the church?
 - 15% said, "No, The Bible gives us the gospel, but how to reach youth with it is up to us."
 - 28% said, "Yes, but there is a lot of flexibility since it doesn't say much."
 - 57% said, "Yes, the Bible gives us all the direction we need to disciple youth and constrains us from using worldly innovations."

"I am greatly encouraged by the results of our survey," said McManus. "American Christians are finally waking up to the disconnect between the clear teaching in Scripture in favor of family-integration and the modern-day church's obsession with dividing the family at every turn. Age segregation, especially during the tender and impactful teenage years,

not only hasn't worked, it's been detrimental. Even worse, it is contrary to the Bible. But the good news is that practices in the churches related to youth groups are changing dramatically. Twenty years ago no one was even asking this question."

McManus cited the following Scriptures to document his contention that it's God's will for the church to embrace the biblical model of families staying together in the service as the Word of God is preached: Deuteronomy 16:9-14; Joshua 8:34-35; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 12:43; and Joel 2:15-16.

"Our fervent prayer is that God will raise up Spirit-filled, Bible-preaching, Christ-centered, family-integrated assemblies from the ashes of our man-centered, family-fragmenting churches," said McManus.

"Plus, the church needs to begin to equip Christian fathers to communicate the gospel to their families," said McManus. "Today, Christian parents are beginning to realize that they have not fulfilled their spiritual duties by simply dropping off their kiddos to Sunday school and youth group, allowing other parents to disciple their children by proxy. Let's not forget the powerful words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up'

(NIV). It is the parents' primary obligation to disciple their own children, impressing God's commandments upon them in the home on a daily basis."

Cameron Cole, the youth group director at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, said, "There is a propensity in our culture to outsource the development of our children. For intellectual development, we send them to school.

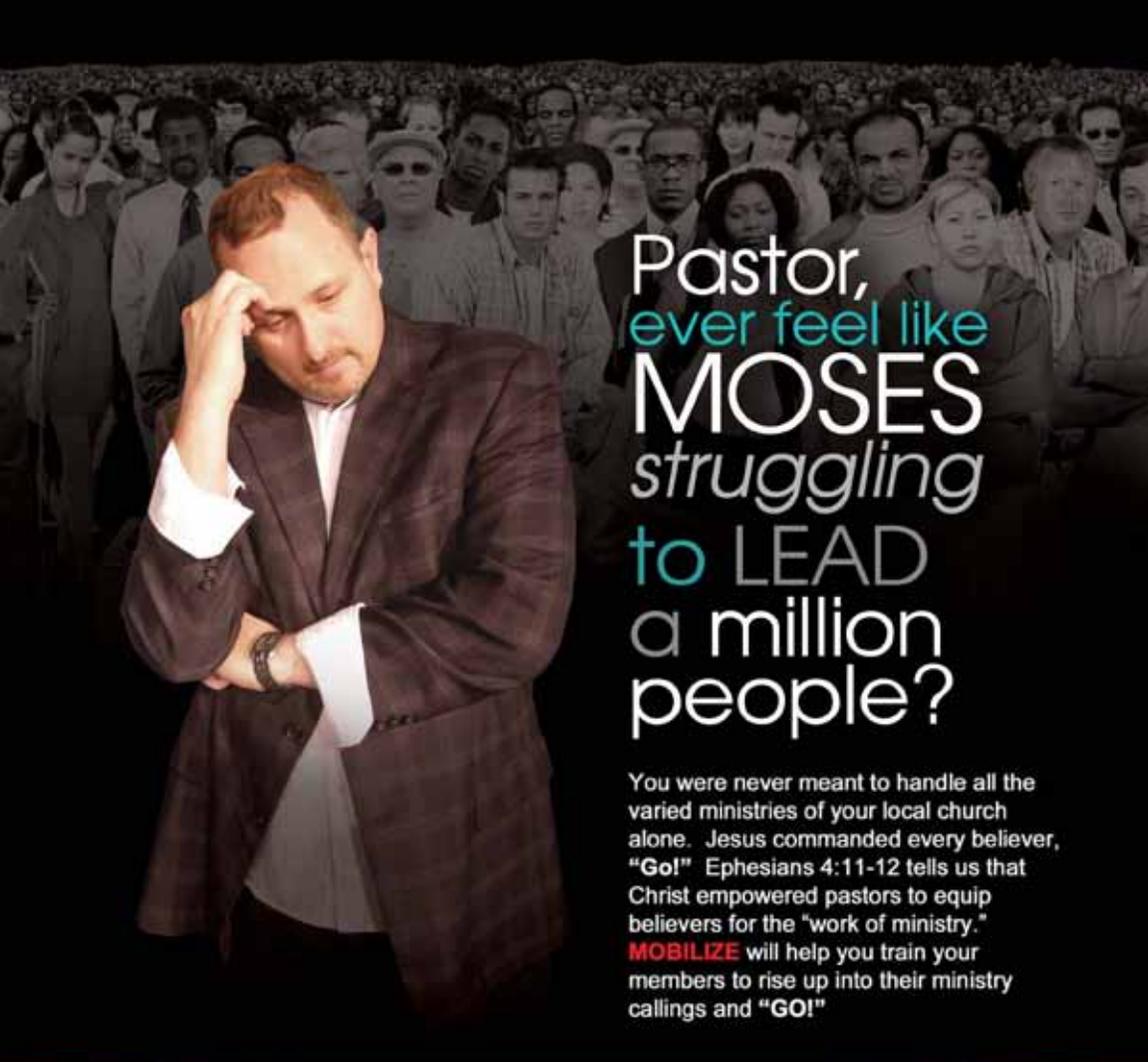
For athletic development, we send them to Little League. And for spiritual formation, we send them to youth group. The church has done a poor job of communicating to the parents that they are

the primary discipler of their children. Parents don't believe this, but the reality is that kids listen to their parents far more than they're going to listen to a youth minister."

"It's time for the Christian father to take the central role which God has ordained," said McManus. "Gathered around the dining room table, the father needs to lead family worship once again, which had been standard behavior for a vibrant American Christian family for hundreds of years dating back to the Plymouth, Massachusetts, colony of 1620. Dad needs to read from and discuss the Bible, sing Christian songs and pray with his family—his little flock over which God has appointed him shepherd. Frankly, I'm not as concerned about what happens in Sunday school in church, as I am with what happens in 'Monday School' and 'Tuesday School' at home with the family." ■

(Source: National Center for Family-Integrated Churches)

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ESPECIALLY DURING THE
TENDER AND IMPACTFUL
TEENAGE YEARS, NOT
ONLY HASN'T WORKED,
IT'S BEEN DETRIMENTAL.**



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SNE COG Regional Director of Education



cogdoe.org

by GLEN
and LONNA
GATTENBY



SOME MAY FEEL that if you pastor a small church in a small, rural community that you are limited in what you can accomplish. I believe a church is not limited by its size, but only by its vision.

The first time I preached at Cottonport Road Church of God, I was delighted to hear about their outreach to the kids of the

community called, "Give a Kid a Chance." The only question I was asked before being voted in as their new pastor was, "Are you on board with Give a Kid a Chance?" To which I answered, "Definitely!" It is truly wonderful to pastor a small congregation who has a vision and a heart for ministry.

Give a Kid a Chance started at Cottonport Road fourteen years ago by Pastor Kern Eschette. He had a vision to help kids in the church whose parents could not afford to buy school supplies and clothes for the kids going back to school. It started small with just a few kids who attended the church, but it has now grown into a countywide ministry providing backpacks filled with school supplies and school clothes for approximately 300 kids each year. This ministry helps families get the kids ready for the new school year and gives the kids the things they need in order to succeed in school.

The planning begins in May before the kids get out for summer break. A letter is sent home with each child to let the parents know that Give a Kid a Chance is available to any child in Meigs County, Tennessee. The letter lets the parents know that applications can be picked up at the local health department. This ensures that these families set appointments for their child's yearly checkup visit with the doctor on staff. The application includes contact information, the child's name, shirt size, and grade level so that appropriate items can be prepared for their child. Also on the application is a place to sign up for a free oil change the day of the event and information on their vehicle so that oil and filters can be purchased. Flyers are placed in shopping bags at Piggly Wiggly, and signs are placed around town to get the word out. Then we reserve the Fairgrounds for the

big day, usually the first Saturday of August, and begin preparations.

Pastor Eschette laid a wonderful foundation for this outreach by getting others in the community involved. He created a network of churches and community leaders who join the church in helping the kids of our community. In May, a letter is sent to all contributors and volunteers who have assisted in the past, along with a form to indicate whether they can contribute financially or through volunteering on the day of the event.

I was truly amazed at the response. We received \$10,025 this year for Give a Kid a Chance, and the total spent was \$10,250. God supplies the need every year. It is truly amazing!

The application deadline is June 30. After the applications are collected, we determine how many backpacks will be needed, what school supplies need to be purchased, how many T-shirts, polo shirts, and hoodies are needed, how much oil needs to be purchased, and what filters are needed.

Of course, the pastor cannot do this alone. My wife and I have a great leadership team consisting of Janice Johns, Amanda and Doug Pritchett, and our church treasurer, Wanda Bryant. Without this dedicated, organized, and committed staff, this ministry could not be accomplished.

One week before the event, the leadership team takes copies of the applications and packs the T-shirts and hoodies for each child. These items are placed in a bag and the application is stapled on the outside. The bags are then placed in large boxes in alphabetical order so they can be quickly located when the child arrives.

The Wednesday night before the Give a Kid a Chance event, everyone from the

church, along with several volunteers from the community, pack all the school supplies in the backpacks and load the truck with everything that will be needed for Saturday. This year, we had over 70 volunteers to help load the truck. We were finished in one hour—record time.

On Friday evening, the truck is driven to the Fairgrounds and everything is set up for the next day. A food truck stocked with hot dogs, buns, chips, and drinks is donated by Piggly Wiggly. Hardee's® provides the cups, and this year, they also made a substantial financial donation. The rented inflatables, popcorn machine and cotton candy machine are delivered. (We make prior arrangements to rent these items.) A few men from the church provide overnight security service at the Fairgrounds.

At 7:00 a.m. on Saturday, all the volunteers arrive. The event is from 8:00 a.m. to 12 noon. We have volunteers at the entrance to direct traffic. A list of everyone registered is given to the registration staff. We have staff for the food truck, shirts, backpacks, and oil changes. Men from the Methodist church assist with the oil changes. The First Baptist Church brings their church van and transports kids from the Fairgrounds to Tan and Styles for free haircuts. Everything for the day is free of charge. This is done to minister to our community.

When all is done, though everyone is tired, there is a tremendous sense of accomplishment and a satisfaction that we have been a help and blessing to our community. We don't do this for pats on the back, accolades, or even to promote our church. We do all this simply to show the love of God. To God be the glory! ■

Glen Gattenby is lead pastor of Cottonport Road Church of God in Decatur, TN.

by
MICHELLE
SAINT-LOTH



Little Is Nothing When You Have COMMUNITY

I GREW UP in a small to average-sized church in Brooklyn, New York. For as long as I can remember, I was involved in youth ministry within that local body.

Youth services and meetings, choir practices and concerts, district rallies, candy sales... you name it, we did it. But one of the highlights of our year, like most youth ministries, was our summer activities.

Every winter we tried to begin planning what activities we would have for our students and their families. Should we have a week or two of camp? Or, do we promote the statewide COG camp? Would it be more helpful for parents if we held our VBS during the day instead of in the evenings? We would pray, talk, and

share in order to come up with a master plan to keep our young people involved and connected to the local church body during their summer break. Oftentimes, our desires seemed unrealistic; well, actually everything we desired to do year-round seemed too far to reach. In those moments of frustration, it often seemed as if the answer to our problem was always money. "The bigger churches," we would say, "can do this without any worries, because they have the budgets." And with that statement, we would look at each other and choose to either get creative or scrap everything in order to come up with another plan altogether.

I was recently reminded of that time in my life. This summer I had the privilege of helping

at two wonderful camps in Central Europe, specifically in the cities of Prague, Czech Republic, and Vrdnik, Serbia. Each camp had a specific goal in mind, but what they shared in common was that they lacked the sort of financial backing some of our churches, stateside, enjoy and with which they expect to help fund their youth activities, especially those happening in the summer. Please do not misinterpret financial lack for mediocrity; everything they did was “top notch” and would rival anything that other camps may have done this summer. They took what they had, and God seemed to multiply it, because they were willing to sacrifice their time and share their talents and gifts. Their willingness to share of themselves to bring together their collective desired visions, in order for the camps to happen, birthed wonderful camps that touched and transformed the lives of many students.

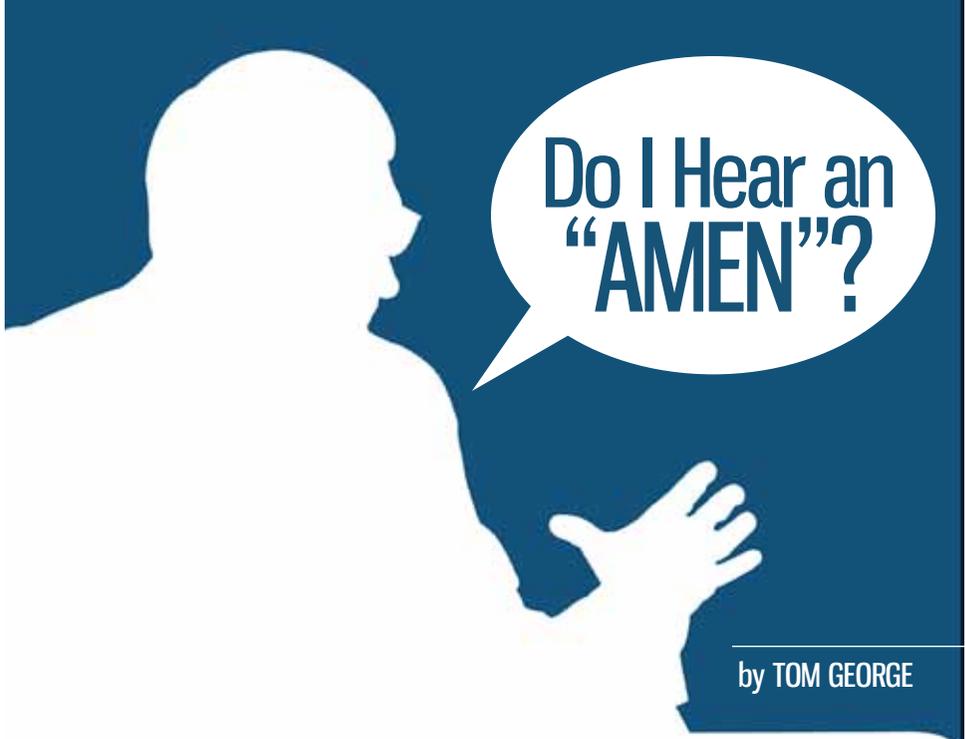
For example, the camp in Prague was an English camp. The students ranged from kindergarteners to high schoolers. The theme was, “Around the World in Five Days.” Sets were handcrafted over a series of many weekends. The sets had to fill, at times, very large rooms, for each room that was used was creatively decorated. Thus, each day when the students walked in, they were whisked off into another world filled with creative gifts—gifts like hanging fish in the art room, the parrot in the story room labeled, “Captain My Captain,” or the “real” flying bicycle in the main hall. The talents and giftings of the whole team as they taught their perspective classes further highlighted what the rooms depicted.

And the same could be said for VrdniKamp in Serbia. From sunup to sundown, lead-

ers were full of excitement and joy though they were exhausted. Some had been working camps the whole summer, and the camp I attended would have been their third. As I helped set up, I was told of the many weeks that members of various churches were called upon to use their talents to ensure that camp was a wonderful time for everyone who was able to attend. Stories were plentiful—like the butcher with the hands of an artist who painted the eye-catching stage backdrop, or the flyers that were created by the church’s worship leader who is also a graphic designer. The VrdniKamp team shared and prayed, not only for the campers who would come, but also for the staff who would come, and the hands that would help them bring everything together. Hard work was never an obstacle. They know what it is to go without, and when you don’t have what you need, you create it into being.

Create they did. Both camps helped me remember that we all have been blessed with community. And in that community, there are gifts and talents we sometimes miss out on because we can’t financially afford to purchase the product we need. Yet sometimes calling on a sister or brother to help cook, bargain shop, build, and paint helps not only get us to our goal but also helps unite our church community. So the next time that you are planning a church event, whether big or small, look around. The answer you have been praying for may not be in the offering or financial gift you desire; it could be the person sitting right next to you. ■

Michelle Saint-Loth is the assistant middle school pastor at North Cleveland Church of God and is in the process of becoming a missionary in Prague, Czech Republic.



Do I Hear an “AMEN”?

by TOM GEORGE

THE RED-FACED PASTOR waxed warm as he delivered his sermon. Making a particularly forceful point, he cried out to the congregation, “Do I hear an amen?” He was really asking, “Do you approve of my preaching?” And, he was making one of two common mistakes concerning the word, *amen*. The first mistake is preaching for an “amen.” The second, and perhaps even more common, is relegating *amen* to a “fill-in” word.

WHAT DOES AMEN MEAN?

According to *Strong’s Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible*, the English word *amen* has its root in the Hebrew word *aman*, which means “faithful, steadfast, sure, surely, trusty, verified.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* says, *amen* is “used to express solemn ratification (as of an expression of faith) or hearty approval (as of an assertion).”

In worship services, *amen* is most commonly used to express approval of the minister’s message or as a closing to a prayer. *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology* states that when one uses the word *amen*, he “puts himself into the statement with all earnestness of faith and intensity of desire.” Thus, uttering “Amen!” should always be done in a serious manner. To use the word casually belittles its seriousness in the worship context.

PREACHING FOR AN “AMEN”

Every minister wants to feel that his message is accepted by the congregation. That is the reason preachers sometimes call for an “amen.” However, preaching successfully entails more than the adulation of the audience. The apostle Paul’s admonition to Timothy makes clear the minister’s responsibility in preaching:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:2-5 NKJV).

Ministers are to preach the Word of God regardless of whether their exhortation, teaching, (and, sometimes, rebuke) is accepted or not.

When the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel was instructed to preach to the people of Israel, God told him, “You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse” (Ezekiel 2:7 NKJV).

It is evident that a minister’s calling is to preach God’s word, even if people refuse to say “amen” to what they have heard. So, ministers should never preach for an “amen,” although it is proper for members of the congregation to express their acceptance of the preached word with an “amen.”

USING AMEN AS A “FILL-IN” WORD

While it is never proper to preach expressly for an “amen,” it is also wrong to use *amen* as a “fill-in” word in a sermon. Some ministers continually pepper their messages with “amens.” This may be done because of nervousness, insecurity, or lack of preparation, but regardless of the reason, it tends to distract listeners from the minister’s message and to make the sermon less effective than it would be otherwise.

The apostle Paul told Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto to God, a workman

that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV). The preacher who has properly prepared to preach by studying the Word of God will go to the pulpit with the approval of God and has no reason to feel insecure and nervous or to grasp for words, causing him to use “fill-in” words.

At times, there will be pauses in a message as the minister prepares to move to the next statement in the sermon. Some ministers may feel that these voids need to be filled, thus they improperly insert an “amen.” However, a brief moment of silence will be far more effective, because it leaves the congregation anticipating the minister’s next words rather than being distracted by an improperly placed “amen.”

Is an “amen” or any other “fill-in” word interjected into a sermon always wrong? No, of course not! For instance, Dr. Paul L. Walker, former general overseer and long-time pastor at Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta, is known for dropping a rapid-fire “amen, amen, and amen” into his sermons from time to time. No one could properly accuse Dr. Walker of being unprepared and using these “amens” merely as “fill-in” words. Instead, they are part and parcel of Dr. Walker’s unique and highly-effective preaching style.

PREACH THE WORD!

Preach the Word! Not for audience adulation and “amens,” but to properly present God’s message. Prepare diligently so that you will be an approved messenger—one who never needs to be ashamed or to “fill-in” words. And, when you have delivered the message God has given you, and your listeners respond with their “amens,” you can be assured that it is because God has anointed you to deliver the truths of His Word. And, you can say “Amen!” to that. ■

TELL ME A STORY

How to
Illustrate a
Sermon or
Lesson



by
PAUL
BRAND
and
PHILLIP
YANCEY

STORY, by definition, connects events in a sequence of pictures. The sequence may be word pictures or *picture* pictures. A story in a sermon or Sunday school lesson illuminates the narrative. Here are some of the word-pictures used in the Bible:

- A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that uses a word or phrase to denote an object or idea used in place of another. The *metaphor* compares seemingly unrelated subjects, suggesting a likeness or analogy between them. One example is *Isaiah 40:31*: “They shall mount up with wings like eagles” (NKJV).

- An **analogy** compares two things. It usually infers that if they agree in some respects, they will probably agree in others.

- An **allegory** is a symbolic expression of fictional figures or generalized truths. An allegory appeals to the imagination, and an analogy appeals to reason or logic. Example, *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan is an allegory.

- A **simile** is something that resembles or compares, using the words *like* or *as*. Example, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water” (*Psalms 1:3 NKJV*).

- A **fable** attributes human values or morals to animals or inanimate objects, which are often the main characters. Jotham related a fable, *The Tale of the Trees*, to Israel in *Judges 9:7-20*.

While the differences between these literary devices are many, a common thread runs through them: *they all involve the language and a literary device of comparison*. The known is compared to something unknown in order to illustrate the subject.

Jesus was a master storyteller. Scripture calls His stories parables. A parable sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results. It uses a concrete narrative to make a

lesson more easily grasped. Most parables are subtle. They are like a seed; they are not a full-grown plant. All of its power and potential is not immediately obvious; it requires time to germinate. It may not produce fruit instantaneously. Jesus trusted the seed to germinate. He left it up to His listeners to ask for further insight.

Just as “9/11” triggers in all Americans a collective memory, Jesus told stories about shepherds and vineyards, triggering their personal memories of shepherds and vineyards. He told stories about ordinary things like seeds, bread, or sheep. He described common situations, such as a boss and workers. He told stories about banquets, garments, kings, servants, and weddings.

Well-told stories interest us. They seize our attention. They transform truth from dull, ethereal thoughts to life situations. They eternalize spiritual truth in such a way that you internalize the truth for yourself.

Well-told stories hold our attention. They create reality from abstract concepts. They help truth become concrete in our minds and in our psyches. We tend to think in pictures; stories clothe truth in flesh.

Well-told stories make truth current. Even an old story, or one in a nontraditional setting, makes the lesson up-to-date. You carry it in your mind. You bask in its spiritual meaning.

Well-told stories stir our emotions. They impact us in ways that precepts and propositions never do. If you want to change lives, you must craft the message for impact and information.

Well-told stories help us remember. Long after the outline is forgotten—even if we don’t remember what the sermon was about—we remember the stories.

Some people are skeptical, even hostile, to Jesus’ message. They were in His day. The disciples asked Jesus what a certain parable meant, and Jesus explained (*Luke 8:9-10*). Our Lord’s response was brief and to the point: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand’” (v. 10 *NIV*). We learn from Him that:

1. Jesus’ teaching by parables was a fulfillment of prophecy (*Mark 4:10-12*).

2. Jesus didn’t hold anything back from the people because they were both eager and able to understand. He taught them all they could handle: “With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand” (*Mark 4:33 NIV*).

3. The secrets of the kingdom of God were simultaneously concealed and revealed. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus concentrated on identifying Himself as Israel’s Messiah (*Luke 4:16-21*). Later, He concentrated more on the nature of the kingdom.

4. Jesus’ stories hardened the hearts of people in the world, and stirred the hearts of the believers. “He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when He was alone with His own disciples, He explained everything” (*Mark 4:34 NIV*).

5. Today the secrets of the kingdom of God are concealed from deliberate unbelievers and revealed to those who believe the gospel. Jesus conceals the truth from those who won’t understand and will not repent, and reveals truth to the receptive.

A true parable speaks powerfully, but it speaks obliquely, until it shatters the defenses of the person who is listening. A Trojan-Horse story is one that changes the setting and scene

where it is told, in order to throw the audience a bit off guard until a point can be made. Jesus often used such stories when the situation was delicate or dangerous, and He could not speak directly to the issue at hand. He told a parable in such a way that it slipped past the listeners' defenses and released the message to the unsuspecting.

A graphic example of the Trojan-Horse story was told by Nathan to King David in *2 Samuel 12:1-4*. When he said a man stole his neighbor's sheep, the King never saw the trap laid for him—until he was caught in it. As Clarence Jordan said, "Old King David, he's looking and looking, but don't [sic] hear anything. He's listening and listening, but doesn't see anything." (*Power from Parables*, No. 1, Compact Disc, Koinonia Farms, Americus, Georgia. n.d.).

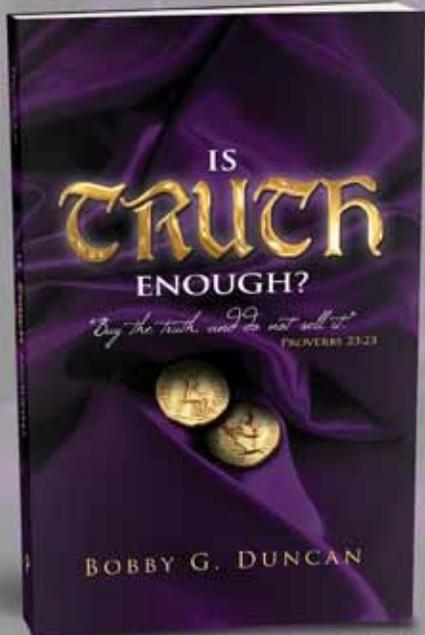
A final word: Tell the story with passion and anointing. Dr. Paul Brand, a medical doctor,

once served in the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India. One day a visiting speaker addressed the student body. Like collegians everywhere, the students were not known for their attentiveness or kindness to visitors.

The visitor spoke in French through an interpreter, but he spoke so rapidly that the translator couldn't keep up—so he just gave up. Yet, the passion of the visitor captivated his listeners. They gave him a tremendous ovation at the end, although they didn't understand most of the message.

Dr. Brand asked a student, "How did you understand? No one here speaks French." The student responded, "We did not need a language. We felt the presence of God and the presence of love" ■

(From Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, pages 54-55).



IS TRUTH ENOUGH?

"Buy the truth, and do not sell it."

BOBBY G. DUNCAN has served as pastor of the Parma Park, Ohio, Church of God since 1994. He and his wife, Sandra, are known for their compassionate pastoral ministry.

His previous books are *God's Deafening Silence*, *Journey of Faith*, *Trading Sunshine for Rain*, and *Nothing to Win but the World*.

"The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote, 'Truth, like gold, is to be obtained not by its growth, but by washing away from it all that is not gold.' In *Is Truth Enough?*, Bobby Duncan makes the case for absolute truth being found only in the Word of God."—Mark L. Williams, *Church of God general overseer*

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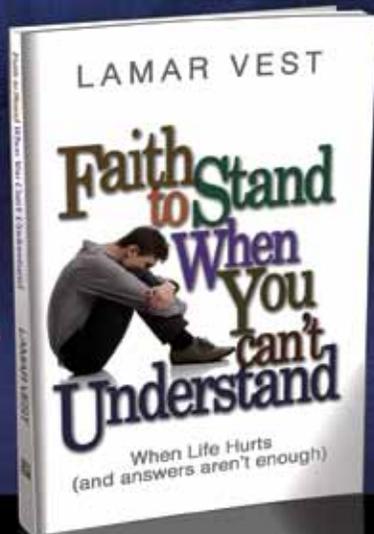
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by TONY RITCHIE

THE CHURCH OF GOD TODAY— PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

With Much to Learn, but a Lot to Offer!

TWO GREAT MOVEMENTS of the Spirit have arisen almost simultaneously over the course of the last century or so. Pentecostal scholar Jerry Sandidge identified these as global Pentecostalism and as initiatives aimed at Christian fellowship and unity. Harold Hunter suggests that these two movements are essentially interconnected. The New Testament term typically used of the latter is “ecumenism” (*oikumene*), implying sharing the same household. Wolfgang Vondey observes that although formal ecu-

menical efforts have been led by mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox groups, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are nevertheless significantly involved. Thus, British theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin says Pentecostals’ powerful experience of the Holy Spirit issues forth in a vitality expressed in deep fellowship and profound unity. The Spirit of Pentecost continues to draw together diverse tongues and people in one accord (Acts 2:1)!

Pentecostals aren’t uncritical or incautious partakers of others’ agendas. Certainly it is

wisdom to be wary regarding possibly apostate religious groups (Rev. 17:1-6). Yet, authentic *Christian* fellowship is vital. Pentecostals specifically desire to sharpen and strengthen ecumenical ties for the sake of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Participation in ecumenical initiatives must ever be authentic, but never naïve. Fortunately, it is both desirable and possible for Pentecostals to cooperate with other Christians without compromising their own faith or values.

A DAUNTING LEADERSHIP TASK

Mature and responsible leadership realizes that no church or church organization can isolate itself from the broader Christian community for long and reasonably expect to remain relevant. Ecumenical leaders Michael Kinnamon and Brian Cope indicate the universality and depth of human need and suffering, which call forth a sense of solidarity among all believers in Christ. In today’s increasingly nonsectarian culture, willful alienation from others is incredibly obnoxious and narrow-minded. One of America’s greatest theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr, respected across the spectrum, insisted that God has a purposeful design in the midst of the present disorder of this world’s civilization. Accordingly, all historic Christian communities must strive together for the realistic realization of God’s design in the present age while hoping for its full realization only in the final form of the kingdom of God.

Biblically speaking, there is no doubt that God’s design in today’s world requires that Christians unite and cooperate. Jesus himself makes that abundantly clear in John 17:20-23. For Johannine scholar Benny Acker,

Jesus here links Christian love and unity with God’s glory. Similarly, Leon Morris notices a dominant concern for Christian unity and divine glory. And yet, although striving for Christian fellowship is certainly scriptural, the present disorder of this world, at times including the church world, means achieving it will assuredly be a daunting and demanding task. Nevertheless, it can also be a richly rewarding endeavor. According to leadership expert James MacGregor Burns, transformative leadership has the greatest impact on people and on historical events. Transformative church leaders who take on the daunting task of reaching out to others and working with them whenever possible can expect to reap rich rewards in concrete results. Their churches will not only survive but actually thrive amidst the many challenges of contemporary culture.

AN INDECISIVE PENTECOSTAL TENET

Admittedly, Pentecostals across the board aren’t quite sure about ecumenism. This ambiguity is probably due in part to dissatisfaction with some very visible forms of ecumenism. Tendencies of liberal proponents to downplay absolute truth do not sit well with Pentecostals. Yet, even among Pentecostals there is vacillation. On one hand, according to Mel Robeck, William Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission had a vision that the Pentecostal movement would in some way bring unity to all churches. The same was true of Charles Parham. On the other hand, Douglas Jacobsen admits that many early Pentecostals had at best an ambivalent ecumenical impulse. While in principle drawn to the ideal of Christian unity, they could be unclear and noncommittal on details. With whom could one have unity? On what

basis could one have unity? How far should unity go? Many questions remain.

Still, beating within the Pentecostal breast is a heart for spiritual fellowship and unity. Pentecostals instinctively dislike extensive and exhaustive debates about standard denominational creeds and decrees. Sophisticated dogmatic speculations tend to take the focus off the elemental value of vital spiritual experience. And these are often bases of subsequent and scandalous divisions. Nevertheless, an inherent dislike for debate and innate desire for spiritual unity has not kept Pentecostals from numerous internal disagreements. Some have led to lingering divisions. Yet there is within the Pentecostal movement a sense that somehow such things aren't as they should be. At their best, and consistently with denominational alliance and deep loyalty, Pentecostals proclaim a prophetic critique of rigid denominationalism. Pentecostals are instinctively more attracted to the dynamism of a movement which demolishes divisive walls built up by human tradition. As I have argued elsewhere, Pentecostals are inherently ecumenical. Nevertheless, much ambivalence remains.

A DEFINITIVE CHURCH OF GOD TRADITION

But there is a notable exception. Jacobsen observes that "Perhaps no one in the early Pentecostal movement was as strong a proponent of Christian unity as Richard G. Spurling, Jr., a leader in the Church of God." Indeed, Spurling was quite sure about the sinful nature of divisions among the churches. He was equally convinced about their cause and cure. Like John Wesley, he lifted up holy love above doctrinal divisions. (Doctrinal statements are

necessary internal guidelines, but not laws for external relations.) Spurling argued for discerning fellowship among the churches based on the New Testament law of love. Spurling insisted that the evidence of the churches being led by the Spirit rather than by men is standing together on God's law of love rather than on some article of faith or creed. Both Christ's Church and true Christian fellowship are built on Christ's law of love. Sectarian confusion among the churches today is traceable to ignorance or negligence of the law of love and Christ's prayer for Christian unity. Love is the means by which members of God's Church know each other. Spurling persuasively says, "We invite to union and fellowship all persons who avow faith in Christ and love to God and His people and a willingness to live a Christian life so as not to dishonor the cause of Christ." In R.G. Spurling, the Church of God has a glorious ecumenical heritage well worth reclaiming today!

Recently, I accompanied the Church of God general overseer, Dr. Mark Williams, to the Mennonite Church USA General Convention in Phoenix, Arizona (July 1-2, 2013). The Church of God and MC USA have been in a dialogue relationship for eight years. This relationship focuses on the body of Christ coming together in love for fellowship and worship (Eph. 4:16). I have been its cochair (with Virgil Vogt, MC USA) for six years. There have been several scholarly encounters, some pastoral and congregational exchanges, and significant high-level leadership interactions. The Phoenix meeting marked the first time a presiding bishop has attended a MC USA General Convention. It was a truly historic occasion. I believe Spurling would have been pleased.

A DESCRIPTION THAT TELLS IT WELL

Bishop Williams and I attended numerous functions and services, enjoying the gracious hospitality at the MC USA General Convention. During these meetings, Dr. Williams frequently spoke about the distinctive history and unique identity of the Church of God. Always, he was an eloquent and exemplary spokesperson for something he is obviously passionate about—the ministry and mission of the Church of God. On several occasions, Dr. Williams described the Church of God as a part of the broader body of Christ with much to learn from others and with something special of its own to offer as well.

These words resonate strongly with my experience as a Pentecostal Christian moving in ecumenical circles. It is a biblically appropriate way of describing the place of the Church of God in the world today in relation to other Christian bodies (1 Cor. 12:12-31). I believe the Church of God has an important role to play in the broader body of Christ, as well as a great deal to offer other Christian bodies. Our rich history and Wesleyan-Pentecostal heritage are valuable resources. This background was a key reason why the MC USA initially approached the Church of God for dialogue. Of course, we have much to learn from others too. The Mennonite tradition stretches back nearly half a millennium. Its staunch sense of community and historic commitment to active discipleship are testimony of a journey from which we can benefit greatly.

Yes, the Church of God is part of the body of Christ with much to learn, but a lot to offer! Being a relevant and vibrant movement today includes connecting with other Christians. Engaging others is essential. Together, we

should seek out ways to serve our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ in the love of God and in the power of the Spirit. Bringing together the streams of these two great movements, Pentecostalism and ecumenism, is one of the most significant tasks pressing in upon church leaders today. Fortunately, several examples from the Book of Acts indicate how Spirit-filled administrators, educators, and pastors might foster greater Christian fellowship.

- Jesus: be *aware* of ever-widening circles of witness (1:8);
- Stephen: be *accepting* of different faith communities (chaps. 6-7);
- Philip: be *attentive* to God's directives regarding others (chap. 8);
- Peter: be *accessible* to diverse people groups (chaps.10-11); and,
- Paul: be *advocates* for breaking down barriers between believers (chaps. 13-28). ■

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Tony Richie, D.Min, Ph.D., *pastors in Knoxville, Tenn. and teaches theology at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tenn.*

A Call to BROKENNESS

by GAIL LEMMERT, M.A., NCC



AN OLD SONG begins: “Heartaches, broken pieces, ruined lives are why You died on Calvary.” Can it be that we as leaders are called to brokenness?

May I suggest that it is part of knowing Christ “and the fellowship of His sufferings” that the apostle Paul mentions in Philippians 3:10.

The dictionary gives a working definition of the word *brokenness*.

- “No longer whole; in two or more pieces after having been dropped or struck with something hard, no longer in working condition, not kept, not honored or fulfilled.” Example: “a broken promise.”

- “Not continuous; a broken line; uneven.” Example: “We traveled over broken terrain.”

- “Weakened.” Example: “Her health was broken.”

- “Destroyed by adversity.” Example: “grief or misfortune.”

- “Split apart by divorce, separation, or desertion.” Example: “Those children are from a broken home.”

- “Imperfectly spoken.” Example: “broken English.”

- “Incomplete.” Example: “lacking parts, a broken set or broken series of books.”

I also got to thinking about what we break. Often if we break something, we just throw it away. Or if something is broken, we think it is no longer useful.

None of these definitions or illustrations are all that pleasant or necessarily desirable, are they?

But on a more positive note, I thought of this: Horses have to be broken to be trained and used for their purpose. It takes time, energy,

and dedication for an animal to be broken. An egg must be broken to use it, eat it, or make a cake or special dish with it. It binds ingredients together and adds flavor. But it must be broken to be of use. Nuts must also be broken to get to the good, edible parts.

So, who is calling us to brokenness? And who really desires to be called to brokenness?

Because of sin, we live in a broken world, not the perfect Eden that God designed for His children. And because of sin, we experience brokenness in many ways. We have all been wounded in this battle for our souls.

Let's think about our little fears and phobias. Why are we afraid of heights, intimacy, or public speaking? Why won't we go skydiving, or share something really personal in a small group, or preach or tell others about the Lord? Why do we not like for others to touch us or criticize us? Why do we bite our nails, work too many hours, or get irritated at these questions I am asking?

Why do we not go out unless our makeup and hair are perfect... other women do.

Why do we sometimes freeze at that phone call from Dad or Mom; what's that all about?

Often we suffer from broken hearts, broken spirits, or a broken mind, and all the pieces are lying on the floor in a heap.

It doesn't take a major battle or a horrific wound like sexual abuse, domestic violence, a death, or a divorce. It can be an embarrassing moment, an untrue accusation, harsh words from a Dad or Mom, and that brokenness can follow us for a lifetime.

I recently saw a quote that said, "The root of offense is unmet expectations." Often, our lives turn out to *not* be the script that we had written for ourselves. But, Friends, Jesus spoke as if we are all broken.

There are over a 125 scriptures about "broke[en]" or "brokenness." The following scriptures are a good example:

- Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted" (NIV). That's good to know!

- Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (NKJV). That's good to know, too.

- Psalm 147:3: "He heals the brokenhearted" (NKJV). We can be thankful for that promise.

- In the Gospel of Luke 4:18, Jesus quoted from the promise of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted" (NKJV). He came to heal us. Praise the Lord!

- Many scriptures in the Book of Job mention broken and brokenness. —Job 17:1: "My spirit is broken, my days are cut short" (NIV).

- In the Psalms, David mentions "broken like pottery" (31:12). —Psalm 37:17: "For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous" (NIV).

Our brokenness and the wounds in our past do impact our present. Regardless of how forgotten or hidden, old wounds shape the way we think, feel, and respond to life. As people, we want to forget hurtful memories from the past. The wounds are ugly, dark, sore, and destructive. We try to lock them away, deny them, and minimize them. Yet they must be brought to Christ, remembered and addressed to experience freedom and wholeness.

I came across the words of the song, "Stained Glass Masquerade" by Casting Crowns. It talks about happy, artificial people who hide their pain behind a smile. The writer calls our brokenness a "stained glass masquerade."

Let us be reminded that Jesus experienced far more emotional, relational, spiritual, and

physical brokenness and suffering than we ever have or ever will experience. He was broken and bruised for our iniquities, and His passion was for me and you and every other broken person in the world. Jesus became a man in order to bring salvation (which in the Greek can literally mean healing to all who believe).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch." Then He fell to the ground and prayed . . . "Abba, Father . . . everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14: 34-36 NIV).

Jesus understands brokenness. He knows the storms of emotional pain. Three times Jesus asked the Father to take the cup away from Him, but then He surrendered His will to the greater plan of God.

Friends, it is in surrendering our pain, hurt, and brokenness that the Lord can bring healing and wholeness.

Some songs that reinforce this principle are:

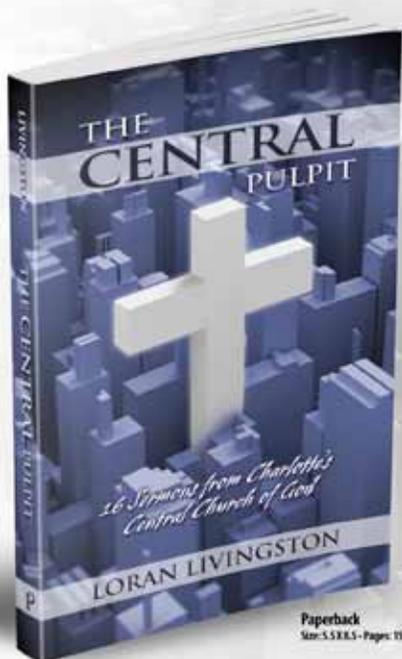
"I Surrender All"

"Jesus Be the Lord of All"

"Lord, I Give You My Heart"

And my personal favorite that I came to know in my own brokenness is titled, "That's What I'm Willing to Do." It talks about trading "sunshine for rain" and even "comfort for pain." The writer promises to do whatever it takes to "break my will."

As I mentioned the horse being broken, and the egg being broken, it is only in that brokenness that they become useful and find their purpose. So, it is with us. It is in our brokenness that we surrender our will to God's will. It is a call to brokenness; it is understanding that we cannot make it without His grace. ■



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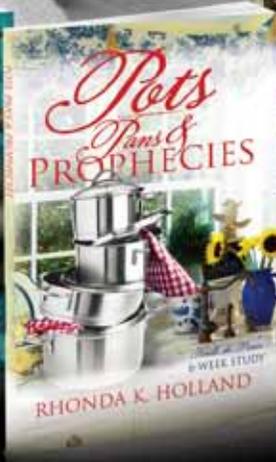
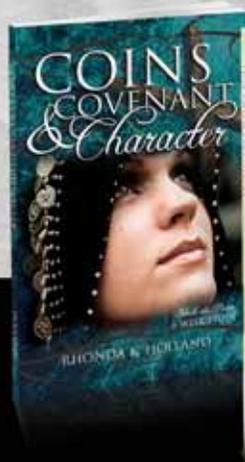
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The CORNER POSTS



STRENGTHS OF THE Christian walk—Patience and Grace—are the markers along the journey helping us to heaven and pointing others along the way. Grace is the gift that continues to be given to pass along; patience is the precious jewel we find when digging through the trenches.

Patience, the Scripture teaches us, is a byproduct of tribulation. Paul said in Romans 5:3-5, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (KJV).

The Message version says:

There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling short-changed. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

The dictionary defines patience as “the act of being patient,” and *patient* is: “bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint, manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain; not hasty or impetuous; steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity.” Yet patience is not the end product, it leads us to hope through the channel of experience. Often the channel of experience would seem to almost destroy us, and yet we survive, and we gain strength.

Patience seems to be one of those things that has to be mined like diamonds, and like diamonds, it is often formed by outside pressure on something that otherwise would have little value or worth—graphite. Graphite is one of the softest substances found in nature. Its two primary uses are: (1) as a lubricant, and (2) as lead in pencils. The diamond, on the other hand, is one of the hardest substances, and along with being used in jewelry, is often used for cutting hard materials in manufacturing. Amazing what a “little” pressure can do; so it is in our lives.

Patience, like diamonds, is rare, and it is precious. How often have we experienced patience from another when learning something new? That patience allows us to experience learning the task so that we have the hope that we are able to complete it. Christ's patience with us also allows us to experience life, and His patience with us creates the hope of a better life—eternal life with Him.

Grace is somewhat the opposite, in that it is something that is passed on from one to another. None of us can truly “dig up” or “develop” grace; it is the gift we receive to give away. It has been passed down through many generations; sometimes, it is the gift that wasn't opened before it was passed on.

Throughout the Old Testament, many of the verses refer to “find[ing] grace,” or “found grace”; in the New Testament there are more references to the gift of Grace. Romans uses the

word grace about twenty times, and Ephesians twelve times in six chapters—Paul seems to have had a grasp of grace when in Ephesians 3:8 he writes, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (KJV).

Paul recognized that grace was a gift from God; and it was to be shared. It didn't come from any work that he could do.

As the song “Amazing Grace” by John Newton (1725–1807) states: “Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

We can't contain it. When it isn't shared, it's somewhat like the manna—it rots and stinks. Grace was given to be given away. Like the sourdough bread starter—we “feed” it and then split it and share it with another.

Pass the grace along! ■

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WAS TIRED. I was really weak. I had caught some type of virus the day before, and to be quite honest, I didn't really feel like ministering to other people.

You know those days? It was Wednesday, July 11, and our team was scheduled to go to the Church of God Dasmariñas to meet up with their evangelism teams for a morning full of street- and door-to-door evangelism.

MINISTRY AT THE WELL

by CRAIG MOSGROVE

It was about to be a “ministry at the well” moment for me that day. In John 4, we see that Jesus always saw ministry in the context of real life. Jesus was in a hurry to feed the 5,000, and yet He still had time for the woman at the well. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns and ministry often happens, not in the context of some formal situation; it often happens in some moment beside the well where some opportunity for outreach, some opportunity for touching another life happens. What happens usually is that we often just blow past it. We are so bound and determined to get somewhere to do something that we miss the opportunity to be where God wants us to be and do exactly what He wants us to do. We have the opportunity to be where His voice is needed or His light has gone out; it's often right there in front of us, and we miss it. Fortunately, on this day, the Lord was not going to allow me to miss this one.

The text says in John 4:6 that Jesus was tired and thirsty. That is a provocative thing,

because we don't often think of Him as being subject to the laws of nature. His divine self submitted itself to His physical self, which was very real. The Son of God was able to get hungry, and He was subject to getting sleepy. He had all of the same physical realities that we experience.

Catch it now. Here is Immanuel sitting next to a well. He is hungry, tired, and thirsty. That is not a moment where you are really looking for ministry. I've been there so many times. I've gone somewhere and preached myself into exhaustion, and when I go to get on the plane, I am tired, counseled out, and prayed out. I think to myself: *Oh, God, I hope no one is next to me who wants to talk.* But what I have learned is that often the person next to me may be the whole reason I went to the place to preach in the first place. It had nothing to do with what I actually did at the church.

Often when you are most tired, some apparent contradiction, some sidetrack, some interruption actually becomes the authentic moment of ministry.

I was placed with a group of leaders from the church who were going to minister in a “squatter” (homeless) area, sharing the gospel with the people who lived there. Immediately, I was convicted. Within ten minutes of being dropped off in the alleyway, the team I was with had already led several people to Christ right there on the street. Intensity was building as I was getting worse, and each home I went in wanted me to pray for each of their family members. My throat was killing me. I remember leaning against the wall in this one shack praying for each of the family members with my head fastened to the wall. Then came the moment. We turned the corner of one alley, and there was a lady about 65 years

old sitting in front of an open doorway into a ramshackled shack of a home. One of the ladies with our group got down on her knees and began to share the gospel with this precious lady. Within five minutes, the lady was convicted and gave her heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. At that time, a younger girl about 20 years old, stepped out from the darkness in the room behind us, and I could tell that she was curious about what was going on. The fellow next to me greeted her in Tagalog, and then she began to speak a little English. I stood up and greeted her. She asked if someone would pray for her 10-month-old boy who was suffering and dying from heart disease. He was just inside the home. I responded immediately with a resounding yes, and asked her if I could come inside to pray for him. She declined and told me that if I came in, he might wake up and start crying which would make his heart worse. The man next to me said, "Pastor Craig, why don't we just intercede with the mother out here for her son?" That is what I did. I grabbed the young mother's hands and began to pray. I wasn't 10 seconds into the prayer and the mother stopped me and said: "Come in and pray for him please."

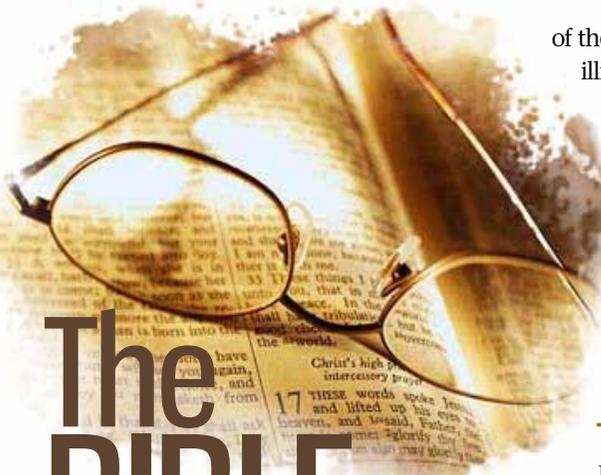
As I turned the corner, there was this precious boy sound asleep in a hanging basket above a bunk bed. I began to explain to the mother what I was about to do. "Ma'am I am simply here to pray for your son. I must be honest with you and tell you that I feel very sick myself, so I will not place my hands on your son's head, but rather his legs and chest. The Bible tells us to call forth the elders of the church and lay hands on the sick, and the prayer of faith shall heal the sick. That is what I am going to do now ma'am. Let's exercise our faith."

I will never forget it as long as I live. As soon as I reached out my right hand to touch that young boy, the Spirit of Almighty God flooded my body. I couldn't make it through the prayer. Tears began to flow profusely as I felt the healing power of God come through my body. Within a few moments, the mother fell to my left and began to cry for the Lord to move. We were all in awe of His grace and goodness. I finished the prayer, and immediately my body was healed! And the baby didn't even wake up. More grace.

We shared the gospel with the mother and prayed with her one last time for her family, and I told her that one of the leaders from Dasma would be back in a week to check on her son to see how he was doing. He would receive medical attention that week. I believe that little boy was totally healed. I am waiting to receive a report from them in the next few weeks!

I then concluded our time with that mother by telling her of His inexhaustible grace. It was not anything we did. I didn't even have enough faith myself to pray and believe. I was weary; I was sick, but I thank God that His grace is not limited by my infirmities. He is so good to us, Friends. I ask that you believe with me for complete healing for this precious family. I can't wait to see them again next summer.

This was my "ministry at the well" moment. What will be yours? Where you are now is the context where God wants to use you in ministry. The context of ministry is real life. Who knows? You may come into contact today with someone else's need. Don't blow by it. Be sensitive to His Holy Spirit. He is longing to show Himself strong. And when He finishes, everyone's jaw will be wide open. "And he will be called WONDERFUL Counselor" (Isaiah 9:6 NIV). What a wonder He truly is. ■



The BIBLE SAYS

by **LUIS RODRIGUEZ**

AN ASSESSMENT of the general condition of the contemporary church would demonstrate the intimate relationship between its biblical knowledge and its relevance for the community in which it ministers. Today, we rarely hear the expression, “the Bible says”; but even when we do, it sometimes is taken as an offense because of its “political incorrectness” or unpopularity. However, both ethics and morality in society are linked to the knowledge of the Church and how it is applied to the daily life of our communities. Some of the questions that arise in the assessment of this topic are: How biblically relevant are our pulpits? How prophetically biblical are our sermons? and, How much do our congregants know about the sacred Scriptures? The lack of knowledge

of the Scriptures will push us toward biblical illiteracy or perhaps something worse: the incorrect application of the Bible.

The following paragraphs will assess some of the general consequences of biblical illiteracy in the church and in society, as well as some tips for those faith communities that continue to believe and live what the Bible says.

BIBLICAL ILLITERACY IN THE CHURCH

Biblical illiteracy can be defined as a basic ignorance of the Bible in the faith community. A study conducted by the American Bible Association reveals that 79 percent of Christian Americans expressed that they have a general knowledge of the Scriptures, but only 54 percent of them could name the first five books of the Bible. According to the report, 36 percent of the respondents read the Bible less than once a year, while 33 percent read it once a week.¹ This lack of biblical knowledge could cause congregations to lose their doctrinal focus, since it is the foundation of doctrine. The result would be churches that are unaware of their purpose and destiny. The Lord Jesus reminded us of the importance of staying in the Word: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32 NRSV). The term *truly* refers to the purity of the intentions of the believer who knows the truth. Without knowledge of the truth, our ministerial and spiritual intentions would look pure, but won’t have the doctrinal basis to be effective. Remember that good intentions are not enough. Some of the effects of the lack of biblical knowledge in the church can be:

- Individualism in leadership that points toward human aggrandizement and personal service.

- A blurred pragmatism that says that if something works, then it's true regardless of how unbiblical or unethical it may be.

- A worship focused on entertainment, not the exaltation of God as the object of our praise.

- A gospel without God and without Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL ILLITERACY IN SOCIETY

First, the most striking effect of the lack of biblical knowledge in the Church is seen in the behavior of our society. T.S. Eliot expresses in his book, *The Rock* that, "Men have left God not for other gods . . . but for no god; and this has never happened before." This is known as social secularism. If the Church does not know the Scriptures, what kind of faith would our communities and society have? Surely other faiths will have the opportunity to expand and grow, but the real tragedy would be that the biblical faith would not inform the ethics and morals of a society that was founded on Judeo-Christian ethics.

Second, illiteracy would cause society not to be able to discern between the sacred and secular; true spirituality from the false. *USA Today* reported in 2007 that 60 percent of North Americans could name only five of the Ten Commandments.² This fact reflects a people unable to discern the ethical and social rules dictated by the Scriptures.

Third, we must remember that our current society yearns for a valuable spirituality. However, it ends up accepting nonbiblical spiritualities that appeal to ideologies as secular humanism, among others things, due to the

lack of biblical knowledge. The Bible instructs society about the spirituality of Jesus and how it influences us to what is right and pleasing to the only sovereign God.

Fourth, biblical knowledge establishes the absolute basics of behavior and relationships, both on a vertical and horizontal level.

TIPS FOR LIVING BIBLICALLY

Here are some tips to establish biblical churches and transform our communities with the power of the Word

1. Establish a committee to oversee biblical doctrine. Their task will be to oversee biblical teaching and proclamation.

2. Make sure that each sermon is biblical and relevant to the context. Each sermon will explain the doctrinal truths in an appealing way to the needs of the community of faith.

3. Include the reading of the Word of God in every worship experience. Sometimes we are so focused on the music and program that we forget the centralization of the Word.

4. Evaluate the hymnody of the church. Ask, how biblical is our hymnody?

5. Biblical education should begin at an early age to establish the desire and the spiritual hunger to know the Bible. Biblical discipleship is not a luxury, but a necessity.

If we renew our commitment to God's Word, we will see a great revival in our communities of faith. ■

Dr. Luis O. Rodríguez is the senior pastor of New Life Church of God in Tucson, Arizona.



¹ American Bible Society, *The State of the Bible*, 2012.

² *USA Today*, March 14, 2007.



ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE with different gifts are needed to make our ministries more efficient and more effective in church work. The Bible calls it the *body of Christ*. We cannot please God or even determine our own success on the basis of the gifts someone else has been given. It's like trying to wear someone else's shoes and clothes that never fit quite right.

Jesus challenged His followers to embrace their uniqueness and pursue the dreams and gifts God had given them. He does the same to us today. This means unwrapping our spiritual gifts, accepting them as uniquely ours (like our very own clothes), and then sharing them with others in ways that build His kingdom.

Some Christians believe a lie from the Enemy who tells them, "You can't serve others. You are too messed up yourself." They fail to hand over the baggage of their past, which many times is filled with guilt and self-afflicted shame. These burdens fuel their emotions and eventually cloud their personalities. They become trapped in a cycle of defeat—unable to unwrap their spiritual gifts.

A crisis of great magnitude may be the waste of spiritual, physical, and emotional energy and the untapped potential of believers sitting in the pews every Sunday morning.

Could it be that too many Christians are trying to serve the Lord (and the church) in areas for which the Lord has never gifted them?

In the body of Christ, too often we accept lesser roles when God has a better plan. He has the right gifts with our names already written on them. These spiritual gifts are just as varied as the roles in any musical production. Some consist of up-front speaking parts, while others are in the background—arranging the stage, making costumes, playing an instrument in the orchestra, preparing advertisements, and printing programs. But each gift is equally important; each gift has an interdependence with the others in the body, and each gift is distributed by the Holy Spirit (read 1 Corinthians 12:8-11). God sovereignly chooses the gift(s) for each believer.

I don't know anyone who doesn't like to receive gifts and unwrap them to see what is waiting inside. While gifts from our friends and family will brighten our days on birthdays and holidays, in no way do they compare to the kind of gifts God gives. His gifts surpass our wildest imaginations. They're what we would have asked for, if we had known what to ask for. He made us, so He knows the exact gift for us.

When spiritual gifts are unwrapped, the body of Christ (all ages included) focuses on worship through the sacraments, testimonies of believers, giving of offerings, praying, and interceding for spiritual needs. This occurs in the home, in the sanctuary, during church fellowships, in the Sunday school, or Wednesday night classroom—anywhere Christians are involved in influencing others for the cause of Christ. ■

Wanda Griffith is an author and inspirational speaker. wgriffith@bellsouth.net

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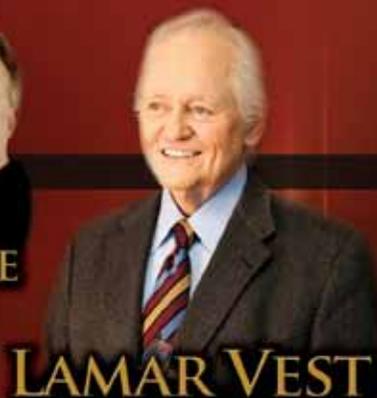


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Church Security and Safety—A Practical Approach

HAVE SUBMITTED several articles for this publication about church security and safety, in light of the tragic shootings in numerous churches. Since that time, there have been more of these events! This highlights the severity of this subject, and the need to touch on some further points here. Review of this subject indicates that these events have occurred in churches of differing sizes and locations. No church can assume that it will be exempt from these horrible acts. This illustrates the need for planning and the formation of a practical approach to this problem by every church.

RESOURCES

I usually place this section at the end of an article, but I think that all of you should know about some very good resources in this area. First, there is an excellent article on church safety produced by the GuideOne Center for Risk Management. It is called “Fact Sheet: Church Violence.” It can be found at www.guideonecenter.com. Click on “Churches” and it will take you to a page called “Safeguarding Ministries on Many Levels.” Under the “News” section, click on “Church Violence (pdf),” and you can read this excellent paper on preventing church violence.

There is another excellent website—www.ChurchSafety.com—sponsored by Brotherhood Mutual and *Christianity Today*. There is an excellent article titled, “Protecting Your

Church From Crime and Violence,” which I recommend that you read. You may have to set up an account on one of these websites to get the article, so if it is difficult for you, please let me know, and I will try to assist you in finding it. The website also has a quick survey titled, “Are We Prepared for Gun Violence at Church?” This will allow you to do a free assessment of where your church is in this matter. I think it is important enough to list just a few of the ten short questions on the survey:

- Does your church have an emergency and crisis plan in place?
- Do you train your leadership, ushers, and greeters in crisis response?
- Do you train your ushers and greeters on how to respond to suspicious people?

In my previous article, I cited two very fine companies located in Tennessee which do specific training on this subject. The companies are known as “Personal Defense Option, LLC” and “Tactical Advantages and Consulting.” These companies provide specialized training in this field and can provide your church or district with a very good course on this subject. The contact person is Mr. Garell Foshee at 865-986-0905.

PRACTICAL TIPS

A review of the materials on this subject points out certain recommendations that seem to be standard. I will try to list what I consider to be the most salient recommendations:

- Have a Safety Plan—Leaders of every church should appoint some knowledgeable person to create a workable safety plan for that church, even if very simple. With the materials and resources that I have listed, this plan can be formulated and should be placed in writing. It also should be reviewed from time-to-time.

- Have a Safety and Security Team or Committee—There is someone in your church who is capable of becoming your church's security director. That person should create a team of individuals to work with him/her in effecting the safety and security plan. Usually there are law enforcement, military, medical, and other specially-trained personnel who attend a church, who would be happy to assist the church in serving on this vital team.

- The involvement of ushers and greeters in the safety plan cannot be understated. These people are the first opportunity for someone in the church to spot or sense an oncoming problem in this area, and they should receive as much training as possible. They should be strategically placed in both the front and the rear of the sanctuary. They also should know lockdown procedures for areas of the church, how to communicate with each other during a crisis, and especially how to assist congregants in evacuating the building, if necessary.

- Working in Conjunction with Law Enforcement Agencies—Local law enforcement agencies around the country are focused on this problem as well, and often they will provide training for your staff and volunteers on how to identify problems and prevent problem situations.

- Regarding security guards, it is better to use off-duty law enforcement or hired security

personnel, rather than creating your own security guard force. Creating your church's own security guard force comes with significant responsibilities and requirements for the local church.

- It seems to be universally agreed that simply placing untrained individuals in the congregation, who have a “carrying-a-concealed-weapon license” is not a good idea, due to the possibility of injury to innocent bystanders. Also, these people typically do not have the training that law enforcement, military, or other individuals may have.

- If a violent incident occurs, in order to protect people in the congregation, someone must be designated to call 911. Also, there should be a plan to lock doors and close off other areas of the church, if possible. Someone must take control and give clear orders to people in the church, assisting them in getting out of the church, or taking measures to protect them while in the church. The main emphasis seems to be to try to control panic situations.

- Also, there are some very good guidelines to follow in protecting your church staff while working at the church.

This is an exhaustive subject, but thankfully, there are an increasing number of very good materials on it, and I hope that you will be able to avail yourself of them soon. Hopefully and prayerfully, your church will never be involved in any situation of this kind, but should it happen, you can make plans to minimize as much risk as possible! ■

Dennis W. Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



MONEY MATTERS Art Rhodes

How Much Is Enough? 8x?

A STUDY BY Fidelity Investments suggests that you should save at least eight times your ending salary to meet your retirement income needs. In other words, if you make \$50,000 a year, you need to have saved at least \$400,000 by the time you retire.

Following this “8x” formula, an average worker should be able to replace 85 percent of his or her preretirement income. While the formula may seem unreachable at this point to you, it should be reached in phases—having at least one times your salary saved by age 35, three times your salary saved by age 45, and five times your salary saved by age 55. If you take these preliminary steps, reaching the “8x” goal by age 67 should be attainable.

As you have heard repeatedly, there are two factors that have the greatest impact on retirement savings—starting early and saving consistently. If you begin saving at age 25 and continuously work and save until age 67, using your workplace provided retirement plan, in our case, the Ministers’ Retirement Plan, you should be able to reach the retirement goals suggested.

These projections assume that you will make continuous annual salary reduction contributions to your retirement plan, beginning at 6 percent annually and escalating 1 percent per year until you reach a high of 12 per-

cent annually; however, the projections only assume an ongoing 3 percent annual employer contribution. The projections also assume that your accumulations will maintain a lifetime annual growth rate of 5.5 percent.

It should also be noted that Social Security payments are factored into the replacement ratio of 85 percent mentioned above.

While some analysts suggest that your replacement ratio should be 100 percent of your preretirement income, others believe that you can do well financially based upon only 75 percent of your preretirement income. The ratio is going to vary based upon your needs and your spending habits. However, the 85 percent replacement ratio takes a middle-of-the-road approach.

So based upon these ideas, where do you stand? If you are age 45, have you saved three times your annual salary? Why not?

There are all types of programs and “apps” that can help you project your retirement needs. However, this simple formula seems to work about as well as any. So try the “8x” formula today—and see how you stack up! ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services.

A Summer Story

... OF GOD'S ENDURING GRACE



LAQUITA PROPPES

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Nothing about this journey of pain makes any sense if we are only spectators sitting in the stands. God invites His children to meet Him on the "field" of suffering. This is where we risk everything to know His heart and His will right now in our desperate situation.

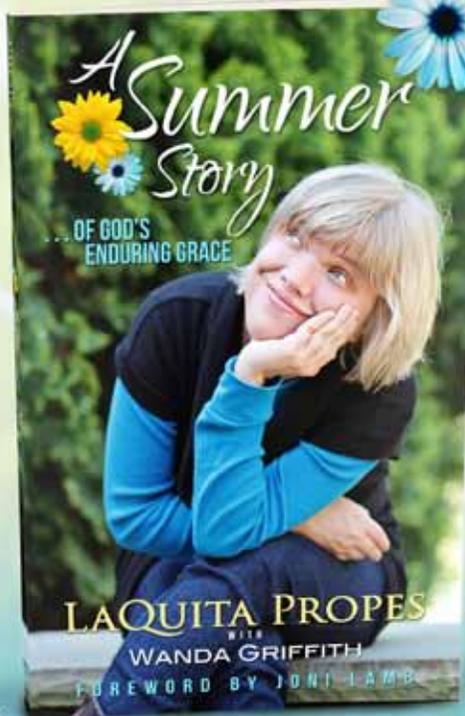
How He enters that game is the best adventure novel you will ever read, only it's your own life and you are actually living it! The only thing He asks is that you cling to Him and resist the urge to crawl back into the stands.

A Summer Story

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\$11.99

Paperback
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SERMON OUTLINE

Carl Richardson

Adapted
from THE
PENTECOSTAL
MINISTER,
Spring 1985.

Games People Play



SCRIPTURE TEXT: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7 KJV).



INTRODUCTION: Boredom so presses in upon our generation that it seems many have gone off on a pleasure-mad binge and meander restlessly from one new game to another. Playing games intrigues us. Games amuse us. But, remember that most games are more dependent on chance than on skill, and those who play games with their soul take the deadly risk of losing it.



I. HIDE-AND-SEEK is a childhood game that finds its spiritual parallel among those who think they can hide their sins from God.

A. Overcome by guilt, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God (Genesis 3:8), but the judgment of sin came upon them. Adam and Eve lost the game.

B. Achan, too, hid his sinful treasure under the floor of the tent. God went seeking what Achan had hidden and found it. The result was judgment and death. Achan lost the game.



II. LET’S MAKE A DEAL is a popular American television game show where contestants trade away virtually worthless items for a chance to win lavish gifts.

A. Simon the sorcerer wanted to make a deal so that he could lay his hands on people and they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For offering money for this divine gift, Simon was strongly rebuked by the apostle Peter (Acts 8:20-21). The Holy Spirit is not a blessing to be bought but an experience to be received. Simon lost the game.

B. The rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking to make a deal to inherit eternal life. Accustomed to making deals, he was not willing to pay the price

when Jesus told him the terms: “Sell whatever you have and give to the poor” (Mark 10:21 NKJV). He went away sorrowfully—deprived of eternal life. The rich young ruler lost the game.



III. MONOPOLY has as its goal the securing of all the properties available on the game board by buying, selling, trading, wheeling, and dealing.

A. The rich man in Luke 12 played such a game. He tore down his barns and built bigger ones. Playing the game of materialism and secularism to the neglect of one’s own soul is a foolish game that may result in the loss of one’s soul.

B. Jesus asked, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36 KJV). The rich man had high hopes of amassing an incredible fortune, but that night God blotted out his hopes: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee” (Luke 12:20 KJV). The rich man lost the game.



IV. CHARADES is a sophisticated game of mimicry and pretense.

A. Some people today claim to be a friend of Jesus in public while privately their hearts are full of sin. It is a hoax, a game, a charade.

B. It seems that the life of Judas Iscariot was a charade. But Judas could not handle his guilt. He went out and hanged himself. The charade was over. Judas lost the game.



V. RUSSIAN ROULETTE is a deadly game.

There is a gun containing one or more bullets. The player puts the gun to his head and squeezes the trigger, risking his life on the chance that the chamber is empty.

A. Sin is like playing Russian roulette with a fully-loaded chamber. Samson was fickle with God. He fraternized with the enemy. He never really took God’s call seriously.

B. Toying with his holy anointing from God proved disastrous. While he slept upon the knees of Delilah, Samson lost his power with God and did not even know it (Judges 16: 20). Samson lost the game.



CONCLUSION: Could it be that you are playing games with your soul? If you are, what makes you think you can win? Nobody ever has. Nobody ever will. Jesus was not playing games when He spilled every drop of His blood on Calvary’s cross. He means it when He says to you, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37 KJV). God never plays games. ■



BOOK REVIEWS

Nellie Keasling

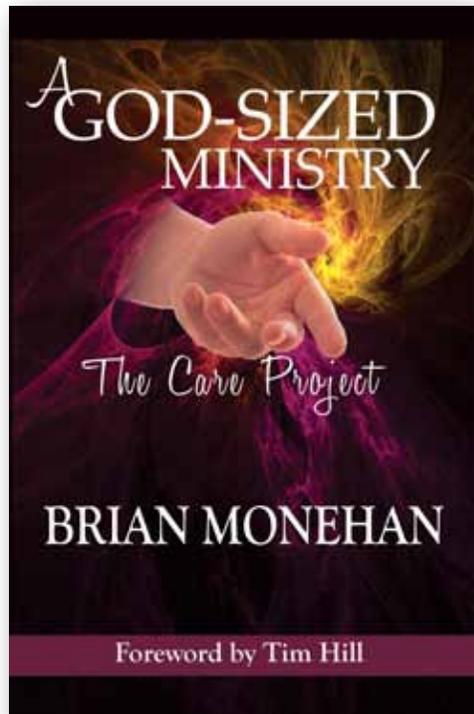
Learning God-Sized Giving

THE BOOK, *A God-Sized Ministry: The Care Project*, was written by Brian Monehan who, at the time, was pastoring the Little Rock, Arkansas, Church of God. In 2007, God spoke to Pastor Monehan, and what God said changed his outlook on ministry and changed the Little Rock Church of God. The author passionately relates his experience with outreach ministry into the community in a book that can be easily read in one sitting. However, it is rich in experience and insights and well worth the reading.

A God-Sized Ministry describes how reaching the “least of these” requires that the church enlist the “most of us” to reach outside the walls of the church to those who are lost and in need. According to Pastor Monehan, “It does not take a world-renowned speaker or a megachurch to have a God-sized ministry.” He says, “All God is looking for is a group of people who will be obedient to Him and willing to work”—in this case, a congregation of approximately 100 people.

When the Care Project was presented to the congregation, they knew if they wanted to be part of this project it would mean raising \$5,000 to buy a semi full of goods to feed 400 families in their community. They would raise the needed money from June through November and deliver the boxes of food in

December to needy families. One of their biggest concerns was not how they were going to raise the money, but how they were going to find 400 families in need in their community. So, one Sunday morning Pastor Monehan asked the congregation to suggest needy families. When only a handful of responses came in, he knew he had to go out into the community to find the needy. He started with the elementary school near his church and then progressed to four other schools in the community. When the time came, the truck arrived;



volunteers from the church unloaded the truck; and others took the food to the needy families in the schools. Many, many people were blessed, and their testimonies were overwhelmingly heartwarming.

The second year, the truck with prepackaged food, toys, and other items was not available. The church had to find another source in order to supply the needs of the families. The church did not want to disappoint these families, so what were they to do? This had now become the mission and the passion of the church members. Monehan describes his experience of going to Wal-Mart to get supplies for the second year of giving. Since that time, he says, "we have built relationships with businesses and companies in the community that sell us the products that we need for this mission."

The church has been enriched by the grateful thanks from the recipients of this outreach ministry. For example, one child responded to receiving new shoes by saying, "You mean the shoes are really free?" The church has also been blessed in another way. Monehan tells how their giving to others helped them get out of debt: "Three years after the first project, we were debt free and had money in the bank. We did not start this ministry for our local congregation to benefit from it, but God has blessed our efforts."

Pastor Monehan emphasizes throughout the book that "you don't have to be a megachurch to make a difference." As a matter of fact, one person can make a difference and start a movement in one's community or congregation. The Little Rock congregation did not set out to do this ministry as a church-growth strategy; rather they are feeding and

helping those in need as unto the Lord. They are truly Christ's hands extended to the needy.

This book may be purchased directly from the author at 103 Thistledown Drive, Natchez, MS 39120, or visit his website at www.monehan.com. You may also purchase the book through Pathway Bookstore by calling 1-800-553-8506. The ISBN number is 978-1-59684-792-7, and the book sells for \$12.00.

Transitioning With Success

Passing the Torch is a story of biblical leadership transition. Few, if any, books have been written on how to accomplish a pastoral transition successfully. This book is a shining example of a successful and effective transition of a beloved pastor to someone who is unknown to the congregation. Later, the unknown pastor became the "beloved pastor." The two pastors are Paul Jones and Bobby Duncan, both successful pastors of the Parma Park Church of God near Cleveland, Ohio.

The book is written by both men, each telling his story from his own perspective. Since Paul Jones was the pastor who was retiring, he tells his story first. He fills in the background of the church, along with pictures of the different buildings. Pastor Jones says, "My wife and I had put 33 years of our lives into this pastorate, and I did not want my successor to have to face what I faced when I came here. I knew that if I didn't approach retirement properly and if I didn't place the building of His kingdom first, I would not only hurt myself and the new pastor, but I would also damage the church."

Pastor Jones sets out to gently lead his people to the point of this transition. Clearly believing that “God works in an orderly fashion,” he reminded his people that this is “Christ-centered, not man-centered.” So, upon the arrival of his successor, Pastor Jones and his wife left their church and determined that they would attend church elsewhere for at least a year. He wanted the new pastor to be able to pastor the church without interference.

The second part of the book is told from Bobby Duncan’s perspective as the incoming pastor. At the 1994 General Assembly, Pastor Jones asked Brother Duncan to meet him for lunch. At that luncheon, Brother Jones gave Brother Duncan a folder, “containing valuable information on the church’s leader-

ship, its ministries, and its financial status.” Brother Duncan acknowledges that he found this information to be extremely helpful during the transition time. He also expressed his deep appreciation for Pastor Jones’ submissive spirit and for ensuring that the new pastor’s authority would be intact.

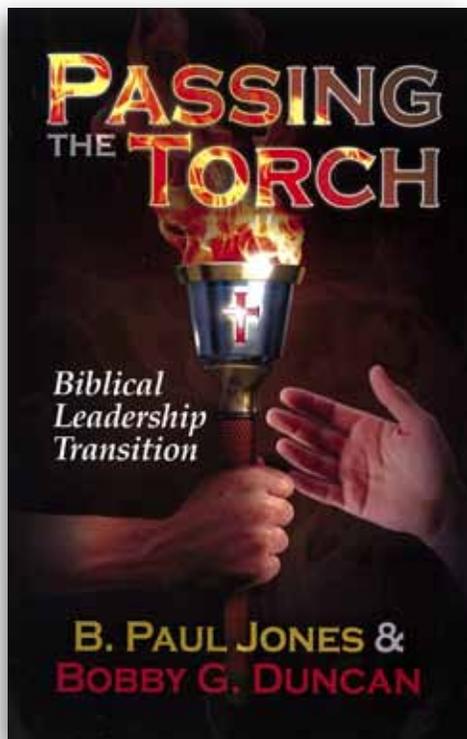
At the urging of Pastor Duncan, Brother Jones returned to Parma Park Church of God to be the pastor emeritus. The two work together beautifully because both men are humble before God. Pastor Duncan says, “A successor should never feel he needs to fill his predecessor’s shoes, because he never can. He has his own shoes to fill, and if he does what God called him to do, God will take care of the rest.”

Pastor Duncan said, “I can honestly say that in all my years of serving as pastor to a number of congregations, I’ve never had anyone support me more than Pastor Jones. He stood shoulder to shoulder with me during some of my greatest challenges as pastor of Parma Park.” Although Brother Jones has given wise counsel, he has declined to give advice; after all, says Brother Jones with a smile, “I am no longer the pastor.”

This book is an easy read and can be read at one sitting. However, the book is filled with good advice and examples of how to successfully “pass the torch.” If you are entering a pastoral transition or contemplating one, this book is a “must read.”

You may purchase this book from Rev. Bobby Duncan, Parma Park Church of God, 12000 Huffman Road, Parma, OH 44130. The ISBN number is 978-1-59684-788-0, and the book sells for \$10.00. ■

Nellie Keasling is Editorial Coordinator for the Church of God Division of Education



CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

Stories posted on Faith News between August and December 2013

Theme Announced for International General Assembly 2014

General Overseer Mark Williams announced the theme for the 2014 International General Assembly, which will be held next summer, July 29–August 1, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida.

The single-word theme, ONE, “arises out of a clear sense of God’s call to our Church,” according to Williams. “The Church of God now finds expression in 179 countries of the world. We come from different backgrounds, speak different languages, and identify with different generations. Yet, if we are to lay hold upon that for which Christ has laid hold upon us, we must be one.”

Williams concluded his remarks by saying, “Whether we worship in churches with multi-site campuses or gather in rented hotel rooms; whether we meet in secret under threat of persecution or gather in public stadiums; whether we pastor bivocationally or are considered full-time; whether we sing Gaither Homecoming songs or Jesus-Culture lyrics; young or old; rich or poor; clergy or laity—we are the Church of God, and we are ONE....with *One* Lord, *One* Faith, *One* Mission.”



World Missions Has an “Amos 9:13” Kind of Year

Church of God World Missions Director Tim Hill recently stated, “We (World Missions) have just closed the books on a most remarkable year, and all I can say about it is this: It’s been an Amos 9:13 kind of season.” He went on to tell the story of a portion of Scripture placed upon his heart when he was elected to the general director post last year. *The Message* Bible states in Amos 9:13: “Things will happen so fast your head will swim; one blessing on the heels of the next.” Since the 2012 International General Assembly, the following has taken place:

- International General Assembly offering for missionaries—received more than \$700,000.
- Marcell’s Dream Initiative launched—bringing in \$760,000.
- A new church planted every six hours of every day around the world.
- USA Church Planting aligned with World Missions.
- Major Leadership Conferences held in every field area.
- Church of God certified to operate as a government-recognized denomination in Cambodia.

- Number of donors grew to over 112,000.
- Membership increased to over 6 million outside the United States and Canada.
- Project FINISH introduced.
- More Unreached People Groups identified and engaged for harvest.

Hill said, "While World Missions adjusted to more than a \$1.1 million reduction in the reallocation and basic budget process, we saw an exponential increase in freewill and auxiliary giving that brought in almost \$1.5 million in non-budgeted revenue." Hill concluded his remarks by revealing the best news of all—1.6 million souls were saved in Church of God ministry around the world.

Lay Leadership Development (LLD) Renamed Mobilize

Local Leadership Development is the new version of the former Lay Leadership Development (LLD) produced by the Church of God Division of Education (DOE). Dr. Donald Bennett, U.S.A. coordinator for Ministerial

Development/School of Ministry, stated the LLD, "has been very successful in training local church leaders. Throughout the years, pastors

who have used LLD have given glowing testimonies about how effective the ministry has been for training their leaders. Mobilize is a 12-month program that assists the local church pastor to motivate, equip, and train leaders for the local congregation." To find out more information about Mobilize, visit www.cogdoe.org or call the Division of Education at 423-478-7005.



Ohio state leadership team: Pat and Jan Wright and Administrative Bishop William E. Isaacs

OneOhio Opens New Offices in Columbus

As part of its continuing merger of former Northern and Southern Ohio, the Church of God in Ohio has moved its executive offices to newly leased facilities in Columbus. This new location will allow for a more centralized access to the state offices for local pastors, ministers, and church leaders. Since 2010, when Northern and Southern Ohio were merged, the offices were in Akron. The new office is now located adjacent to the Port Columbus International Airport, approximately 10 minutes northeast of downtown Columbus, is easily accessible from all parts of the state, and provides an efficient and functional location for the business of the state church community. The website is www.ohiocog.com.

International Council Concludes with Joint Session

The International Council of the Church of God concluded its biennial gathering in September with a joint session of the International Executive Council, comprised of the Council of Eighteen and the Executive Committee. General Overseer

*Church of God International Council
at their joint session in September*



Mark Williams served as moderator for the two-day meeting, which included representatives and field directors from Africa, Asia/Pacific, Caribbean, Europe, and Latin America.

Church of God Launches “Vital Initiative”

The Vital Initiative is a ministry to, and movement among, the pastors of smaller churches. It presents a new paradigm of ministry that places high priority on the importance of small churches in Kingdom work in the twenty-first century. According to General Overseer Mark Williams, the mission of VITAL Initiative is to “help the Church of God realize and utilize the place and power of small churches in twenty-first-century Kingdom work by revaluing pastors, reclaiming mission, and revitalizing small churches.” The Church of God is a denomination with the majority of pastors serving in small congregations. The pastor is the key to the local church,

yet small church pastors do not see themselves as a significant part of the denomination.”

To view the interview between General Overseer Williams and Michael Nations, go to the Church of God website and click on the Vital Initiative graphic.





SAVE THE DATES

MONDAY, JULY 28, 2014

PRE-ASSEMBLY MISSIONS CONFERENCE
THEME: "APPLAUSE: CELEBRATING MISSIONS TRIUMPHS"

MISSIONARIES AND NATIONAL LEADERS WILL PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP AND TRAINING THE DAY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY.

THURSDAY, JULY 31, 2014

EVENING MISSIONS SERVICE
THEME: "FINISH: COMPLETING THE GREAT COMMISSION"

THOUSANDS WILL WORSHIP, CELEBRATE, AND LEARN ABOUT GOD'S PLAN FOR COMPLETING THE GREAT COMMISSION.

