Footwashing: View From a Shelter
Ministers and sexuality

In an otherwise excellent issue on the minister and sexuality (November 1994), almost nothing was said about romantic fantasizing, which is one of the most significant contributing factors to an affair. No reference whatsoever was made to it in your “How to Protect Your Marriage From an Affair” list. Had I been making the list, the refusal to entertain romantic fantasies would have been near the top of the list.

—Marvin Moore, Caldwell, Idaho.

The special issue on the minister and sexuality pulls upon my heartstrings. Early in my ministry I spoke with a God-fearing pastor who took his wife with him into every counseling session he had with women and gave his hearty recommendation to such a practice. I bought into the program and practiced it for a short while until I read more of God’s counsel: “Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, . . . to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:3-5).

Women, not men, are to counsel and work with women. Each time a minister becomes the sole counselor for a distraught woman in his parish he is flirting with disaster. Adventist ministers have this counsel: “You should not feel it to be your duty to converse with young ladies upon certain subjects, even if your wife is present” (Ellen G. White, Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 2, p. 767). “Let there be experienced women to educate and train the young women in propriety of deportment and influence. Do not let them communicate their private history to any man living. This is not God’s order” (ibid., p. 768).

Perhaps women’s ministries is the pastor’s most effective agency to serve the women in the church.—Kevin R. James, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Negotiating with the law

I wish to take exception to the exception in Martin Weber’s excellent editorial “Negotiating With the Law” (September 1994). Does God alter “the laws of His physical universe to save people or reveal Himself to them”? Might it not rather be that occasionally He uses laws or forces with which we are presently unfamiliar? Certainly our generation could show many “miracles” to fisherman Peter, such as pulling ice cubes out of a refrigerator. However, we would not have altered any laws. God, who invented the whole universe, certainly knows of wonders that might appear at first blush to alter rules with which we are familiar. Ultimately, of course, we realize that ice cubes, or water on which one can walk, or even the solid earth that supports our more pedestrian peregrinations, are all wonderful; all testify to a wonderful physical world designed by an omnipotent Creator for His pleasure and ours.—James Astleford, Wattegedera, Maharagama, Sri Lanka.

The church newsletter

I enjoy reading Ministry. Even though I may not always agree with every author, I find the journal interesting and thought-provoking. Glen Holland’s article “The Church Newsletter” (September 1994) reminds me of my own discovery. My church was also seeking to reduce excess spending. One of the areas that we looked at was our monthly church newsletter. Was I pleasantly surprised when I stopped printing it!

One of the things that got me to thinking about discontinuing its publication was another article on church newsletters. It stated that most church newsletters are read from the time they are picked up from the mailbox until the reader gets into the house. At the most, a church newsletter will receive two to three minutes of attention! As I thought about the six to eight hours a month that I spent producing something that would be read in a few minutes, I wondered if it was really worth all the work!

Much like the author, I too thought that the monthly newsletter to missing members reminded them of the church. However, in 17 years of ministry at the same church, no one has ever told me that they came back to church because of the newsletter!

So three years ago I quit publishing a monthly newsletter. It was one full year before anyone said they missed it—and that was only one person! Since then no one, absolutely no one, has said they missed it!

I feel that I have an extra eight hours a month to use in a more productive way for the Lord. Rather than print the church newsletter, I use the weekly bulletin. It has all the same information in it as the monthly newsletter. In fact, I have taken it with me while visiting and left it in the homes of absentee members.—R. Keith Corum, pastor, Willows Christian Church, Willows, California.
We publish eight articles in this issue, almost a record for us. A survey of our readers indicated that you like shorter articles. We are trying to please. Look for shorter articles in the future.

Make sure you read “Legalism: the power to bewitch” by our associate editor, John Fowler. He shows the absolute supremacy of the cross. Fowler does not deny the importance of the law, but it is impotent to save. Fowler also has no patience with cheap grace. Legalism is deceptive because the sincere believer wants to obey. So read this article to find out how to follow God, have faith, be obedient, all without being a legalist.

Our cover article, “Foot washing: view from a shelter,” shows how meaningful foot washing can be as part of the Lord’s Supper. While we do not have dusty feet as they did in Jesus’ day one can still find twentieth century meaning in this ancient ceremony.

Sexual abuse has, unfortunately, become all too common in the church. Bobbie Drake, a professional counselor, provides five important steps to help you when confronted with this problem in your church.

Every pastor has to preach, just as night follows day. James A. Cress, the pastor’s pastor, shares some simple, yet profound, ways to make your sermon live. This is just some of the good material in this issue. Please let us know when you find something you like. People tend to write only when they disagree. We like to know when you do agree. We do not want to take your silence as evidence that we have fed you. Communication is a two-way street.

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"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34).

Although I grew up in a small town, four miles out we had our "farm," a seven-acre plot, with its menagerie of animals. The chickens didn't interest me. Horses did. However, when one of my sister's favorite hens hatched a brood of the cutest little striped fluffy balls I had ever seen, my interests became more varied.

Mother hen seemed to have a terrible time trying to get those fast-moving, hardheaded chicks to obey. She would cluck them to her, settle down on them to keep them warm, and then, one by one, we would see heads start peeping out from all directions. She would settle down again and fluff out some more, and in a moment, heads would all pop out again. Hard as she would try, those chicks were determined something was more interesting than staying warm and secure under her wings.

The chicks were only a few days old when the weather forecaster predicted a hard freeze. We threw extra hay in the barn, shut all the windows and doors, and watched as the horses snuggled together in their cozy stalls. The chickens all nested for the evening in their chicken house side. The hen and her brood settled in their soft nest. As we could have predicted, those curious little chicks would not stay under her. She went all through the routine fluff and rearranged several times, but heads continued popping out. We left for the night, wondering if the hen would ever get a wink of sleep because of these 14 rebellious chicks.

When we opened the farm doors the next morning, the mother hen's usual patience gave way to panic. With agitation and frenzy, she cackled incessantly. Strewn around her were eight frozen dead chicks. The other six were huddled together deep under her feathers, never moving.

Paralyzed, I surveyed the scene. All I could see were dead chicks. Poor mother hen! She had tried so hard to keep those chicks safe, warm, and protected, but whatever it was that attracted their attention—flies on the wall, the flicker of the barn lights, or just plain curiosity as to what's out there in the big world—it was more of a temptation to them to pursue these things than staying safe and secure under her warm wings.

Ministry's limitations

Jesus, the Great Pastor, used the analogy of a hen and her chickens to describe His love and care for His people. Pastoring the flock 2,000 years later, we can still relate to His concerns for those to whom we have responsibility of spiritual nurture. Frequently our members stray away from the safety of the church family. Different interests, bright lights, other "pseudo" ministries, enticing entertainments, or just plain boredom with the "safe," all draw a person's attention away until one morning they wake up and find themselves cold and dead to the fellowship and safety of the Body. Then we start looking inward and become self-critical. We flog ourselves mentally for what we could or should have done pastorally to prevent the loss.

As pastors we seem many times to have a self-set obligation that not one shall stray. Should one leave, we take it as our fault. We think we didn't do enough—if only we had visited one more time, made one more call, explained more fully a question about the church, preached a shorter sermon, used livelier illustrations, done just one more anything! And yet, would it really have made a difference?

Satan would like for us to focus on the "lost" or "dead" as being a result of our failing. And, it doesn't make it any easier for us when people make us the target for their bitterness.

As pastors we can't save everybody. In fact, we can't save anybody. Only Jesus can. And He can save only those who come to Him by free choice. The God who created each little chick made us, the crowning glory of His creation, with brilliant minds and the freedom to choose.

When we forget this, we slip into discouragement. Satan would like us to dwell on his victories—those he has enticed away from a warm relationship with Jesus to pursue their own fancies. And in becoming discouraged over those who leave, we might, at the same time, neglect those who still hunger for the nurture of our ministry.

Ministry with a heart

Jesus had the heart of a pastor. He understood how frustrating it can be to never be able to gather the whole flock (Continued on page 31)
Salvation in one word

J. David Newman

If you could boil down the essence of salvation to one word, which one would you choose? Can anything as complex as how God saves sinners be reduced to one word? On the assumption that it's possible, what word would you choose—grace, blood, justification, salvation, gospel?

Jesus tells the story of a rich young man who came to Him asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)* Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, to obey (v. 19). It seems that Jesus reduces salvation to one word—obedience.

On another occasion a group of Jews came to Jesus asking the same question, what must we do to get eternal life (John 6:28)? This time Jesus introduces a different word—belief. "Believe in the one he has sent" (v. 29). How could Jesus give such different answers to the same question? Is it true that one has to keep the commandments to get to heaven? Is commandment keeping the basis of salvation? If it is, then it seems to contradict Jesus' second statement, as quoted above, and the clear message of Romans and Galatians.

Same message

Actually Jesus was saying the same thing in each of the passages. Jesus takes individuals where they are and adapts His language to meet their needs. Consider the passage in John 6. Jesus continues with an analogy comparing His body with bread and His blood with wine. Unless one eats His flesh and drinks His blood, one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. This analogy was so difficult to grasp that many of His disciples immediately ceased to follow Him (v. 60).

The analogy is not so difficult to understand. When you take bread into your mouth, how much of it do you eat? When you take liquid into your mouth, how much do you swallow? All of it, of course. You swallow 100 percent of the food and liquid. Jesus was trying to tell the Jews that belief means accepting Jesus completely, not partially. Halfway measures do not work with God. Ninety-nine percent converted is as lost as 9 percent converted. You cannot say to your spouse, "I am faithful 364 days of the year. You would not mind if I was unfaithful just one day in the year, would you?" You would not think it unreasonable for your spouse to want you to be faithful 100 percent of the time.

But what about the rich young ruler? Where was belief there? When the young man protested that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus did not argue with him. Jesus told him to sell all that he had and follow Him. This the young man reluctantly refused to do. Again it seems that Jesus is emphasizing the doing rather than the being, obedience rather than faith.

To really understand what Jesus was trying to say, we need to look at the story immediately preceding this one. Mark tells the story of the little children coming to Jesus and then says, "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15). What is unique about a little child? Some will answer, "Trust, innocence, naiveté." However, adults can also have these qualities. If you were to place a little child with a backpack and full survival kit out in the wilderness, alone, in subzero weather, how long would that child survive? By contrast, place a grown man, fully trained, with the same resources in the same situation, and he could live for a long time.

Dependence

Little children are totally dependent on others for their existence. Not partially, not somewhat, not almost, but totally. So Jesus wanted the rich young man to sell everything so that he

(Continued on page 31)

Weber takes on new role

Martin Weber, associate editor, is moving to a different position in the General Conference Ministerial Association. He will remain with Ministry as project editor, and will coordinate our subscriptions and seminars with clergy of other denominations. He will also coordinate the Ministerial Association section on CompuServe SDA-Online, where he will oversee, in particular, the materials that are entered into the library section.
Dealing with pluralism

A. Gerhard van Wyk

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces a dilemma. Unlike our early beginnings, we are now a world church, operating in more than 200 countries. As we live, work, and witness in a world of varying cultures and divergent ethnic and national ethos, we become conscious of increasingly pluralistic trends. Even though unity in diversity has been the historic hallmark of Adventism, this can no longer be taken for granted. We notice differences among ourselves in theological, missiological, organizational, and cultural arenas. In the face of such a dilemma, we need to ask ourselves some sensitive questions: How are we to cope with the challenge of pluralism? Are we interacting and dialoguing with those who differ from us? Are we perhaps isolating ourselves for the sake of our own security, oblivious of the long-term detriment such a stance may have for the church?

Theological pluralism refers to a condition in which individuals may differ on theological issues but interact with each other in such a way that they complement each other and respect each other’s beliefs. They also cooperate with each other in order to broaden their own personal and corporate understanding of God’s truth. In this sense Adventism may be characterized as an organization with theological, confessional, and cultural pluralism, but it is held together by its pursuit of a common goal and a unique philosophy.

Pluralism in the New Testament church?
The New Testament records several instances of differences of opinion in the early church. Early in the life of the apostolic church there arose a “murmuring” of the Grecians against the Hebrews (see Acts 6:1). Paul and James held different emphases in regard to faith. The four gospels describe the life of Jesus from different perspectives. Even in church structure, as Geldenhuys points out, we cannot speak of one church structure; we should rather see it as pluralism of church structure. The Jewish Christians tended to have a structure centered on the elders, whereas the Corinthian church followed a more spiritual-gift model.

Although there were differences in their approaches, focuses, and the prominence they gave to different events, a definite unity of faith dominated the early church. This unity was attained not by uncritical like-mindedness, but by willingness to dialogue and interact with one another in regard to their differences.

But what about differences today? How do we approach pluralism? Is pluralism a blessing or a curse? How can we maintain communication and promote dialogue in the midst of pluralism? We shall now consider these issues.

Approaches to pluralism
Approaches to pluralism vary.
First, there is individual relativism, allowing each one to do their own thing. Reductionalistic in nature, this approach has no concern for others and their beliefs.

Second, there is the strategy of pretense. We try to “wish away” the differences and pretend that they do not exist. We may even try to make ourselves believe that the problem will solve itself. In a Sabbath school class, for example, a discussion on controversial issues is often stopped for the sake of unity or to create an impression that we are all in basic agreement. This, however, is counterproductive, because people who do not get an opportunity to air their opinions will communicate them negatively.

Third, there is polarization. In our effort to resolve conflict caused by pluralism, we often categorize viewpoints into two opposite positions—liberal versus conservative, for example. Such an approach is one-dimensional. It aims to seize power. It is seen as bipolar, two opposite positions—one winning and the other losing. One group considers itself as loyal church members; consequently, those who differ from them are labeled as enemies of the church. The different perspectives are reduced to two extreme viewpoints—those against “new theology” and those in favor of new developments.

Modern conflict management theories are more and more against such a model. Without a denial of the fact that conflict can occur, a complex society with different values and norms suggests the possibility of more than a bipolar situation, requiring differentiation of concepts and terms. Theology is no exception, even though it is necessary to affirm certain priorities essential for a confessing community.

Conflict, therefore, cannot be hastily manipulated in a simplistic manner. To do so may be risk-free and may lead to a situation in which one viewpoint either conquers or coexists with another without engaging in real dialogue. The result is the deprivation of value and depth to the community.

Fourth, there is exclusivism. To overcome pluralism, some may establish their own society and form an exclusive organization. Any group that forms an exclusive society is first and foremost busy with its own well-being at the expense of the main body to whom it belongs. For example, until recently, many White members in Southern Africa wanted their own White conferences (and unions) for a good reason—to enable them to bring the message to those of their own culture. Although this is a good motive, the well-being of God’s church as a whole is of more importance because a divided church cannot proclaim the full blessings and peace of God.

Fifth, there is living with pluralism. Not just living, but creative living. Creativity assumes the possibility of more than a dichotomous existence. Theology is no exception, even though it is conditioned by history is considered irreversible and absolute. The search for truth and what is spiritually and morally genuine must inspire us to go everywhere, even to those who seem to be in opposition to our own viewpoints and to those who, from a scientific approach, seem to be contributing nothing worthwhile to our research. We need laypeople and theologians to complement our perspective. We must be careful not to think and act as if our culture, subculture, or group can exhaust the richness of God’s revelation.

**We must be careful not to think and act as if our culture, subculture, or group can exhaust the richness of God’s revelation.**

To them pluralism may constitute a threat, and they may wish to operate the church as a closed system where the focus is to comfort rather than to challenge God’s church to be a new creation.

On the other hand, if we are willing to see pluralism as a mosaic in which different perspectives occupy interactive positions, thus revealing a picture that displays the full reality of God’s truth, pluralism can be an enriching experience for Adventism.

The key to developing such an attitude within the church is communication.

**The importance of communication**

The God of the Bible is one who
The need for communication

Increasingly many church members (including theologians) feel that the church functions institutionally. Even its committees on cultural and theological issues operate with an institutional and pragmatic approach, deciding on what is good for the institutional church, and in the process unwilling to address serious questions that demand practical and realistic answers. The “laity” are called upon to integrate their idealistic theories with the decisions of the church or live with unresolved tensions.

Can such a situation be acceptable? As Tarasr points out, members of a majority often delude themselves into thinking that the feelings and beliefs they express are those of the general population. In situations of such “peaceful coexistence,” the majority is often viewed as self-righteously paternalistic. Differences of opinion are “allowed” so long as they do not disrupt the status quo. Such differences may even be adopted as an inter-

Good communication gives others the opportunity to decide for themselves. There is no emotional or intellectual coercion.

Good communication gives others the opportunity to decide for themselves. There is no emotional or intellectual coercion. Communication is not manipulation of the other. Good communication gives others the opportunity to decide for themselves. There is no emotional or intellectual coercion.

Communication is not apologetics—a one-sided defense of our own convictions and prejudices. It is dialogue, and dialogue’s primary concern is not defense, but search for truth. As Bandura points out, meaningful dialogue is not simply reaching an agreement through compromise or producing a situation in which one is a winner and the other a loser, but creating a learning situation for the participants. This presupposes that any discussion must begin with issues underlying the conflict, and proceed from there to resolving the conflict itself.

A climate for dialogue

True dialogue can take place only when appropriate climate is created. Such a climate requires the following:

Accept the integrity of others. In an effort to protect God’s truth and His church, we may be tempted to see others who differ from us as critics out to harm the church. Because we are so involved in constructing our own theological model, we are convinced, more emotionally than logically, that ours is God’s only truth. If we accept the integrity and sincerity of others, we will be more open to view differing arguments in a friendly and differentiated manner.

Treat others as our equals. Faire refers to “equihuman.” The recognition of the other as equal implies a real encounter: we can look each other in the eye; talk with, listen to, and assist the other but never treat him or her as an object that can be taught or spoken to. To treat others as equals does not imply that we all encapsulate with equal fullness the totality of God’s revelation. Quite the contrary! It is to accord respect to all who are striving, to the best of their abilities, to understand and be true to God’s truth.

Learn to appreciate different perspectives. Developing respect and appreciation for others and their convictions cannot be done by “book learning.” We need to evaluate other people’s views from their perspective. We need more than knowledge about one another’s convictions. We need knowledge of those who differ from us, their experience and their perceptions. For example, although we can never truly appreciate what it means to be poor or despised, nothing should prevent us from trying to understand their feelings.

Trust others. Faith in others refuses to accept human failure as the
final verdict. With love, faith, and humility we can develop a relationship of mutual trust that leads to constructive dialogue.

Listen. The listening mode in dialogue is important, but it must be listening with a heart. By listening to others disclosing themselves, we can help them discover something unknown to themselves. Sometimes we are inclined to listen in a selective way; we listen for weak arguments to use against the one making them or to score a point. We, individually as well as corporately, as a church become poorer if we do not listen to each other. If one of our members is being ignored, we are all going to be losers in the long run. As Adventist Review editor Johnsson so aptly states: “Listening is the key. Leaders, at such a time as this, need to have their ears close to the ground, to be in touch with people—not telling them what to do, but just listening to their concerns.”

Sometimes people who make radical statements do so in order to force us to take cognizance of what they are saying. Is it possible that some Seventh-day Adventists have left the church not because they disagreed doctrinally with the church but because no one really listened to them and attended to their needs?

Adopt a more understanding approach. According to Lee we cannot acquire a wholistic experience of others’ standpoint by limiting dialogue to a cognitive exchange. Lee suggests that we enter into all their life situations—work, outreach, fellowship, worship, service—in order to appreciate them fully.

Such a step may require humility on both sides, as well as respect for each other. We must put aside all paternalism or feelings of superiority and must exercise patience and self-control, particularly in dealing with what may be perceived as wrong interpretations of faith and doctrine.

Have a repentant attitude. Those that seek for a true dialogue must admit their responsibility for misunderstandings, for distortions of truth, for ignoring or refusing to accept truth, and for seeking to claim exclusive monopoly over truth. True dialogue requires that we recognize the possibility that we may be wrong, that truth may lie elsewhere, and that we may have to change.

Be open. Openness is the very basis of dialogue, and it may require risking what is near and dear to us—our hopes and fears, our strengths and weaknesses, ourselves. As Tarasar says: “We cannot pretend to know and live by the truth if we are not willing to expose that truth for all to see and hear, to question and judge against ‘truths’ that others hold dear.”

Have hope and love. Dialogue requires hope, an active hope, that is willing to work for success, and not an impatient hope that gives up in the absence of results. The dialogue we are seeking is not only among participants but between God and participants. While listening to others we find our inner dialogue merging into a dialogue with God.

Such a dialogue can exist only if there is real love for God and for each other. Ellen White describes that kind of love when she speaks of its characteristics in terms of “forbearance,” “beneficence,” and “a freedom from envy and jealousy.” “The person who cultivates the precious plant of love will be self-denying in spirit, and will not yield self-control even under provocation. He will not impute wrong motives and evil intentions to others. . . Love for God and for our fellow men will not be revealed in acts of rashness nor lead us to be overbearing, faultfinding, or dictatorial.”

3. Ibid., p. 97.
6. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 208.
13. Ibid.
Legalism: the power to bewitch

John M. Fowler

The emphasis on obedience to the Ten Commandments, particularly the fourth, often leads to the charge of legalism. The charge, of course, is false, but at the level of personal assurance and appreciation of salvation, the danger of being or becoming a legalist is never far removed. Legalism is the perpetual foe of the good news of the gospel, and therefore it is our Christian responsibility to be aware of what it is, what it is not, and where our safety lies in the face of its bewitching power.

What legalism is not

Legalism is not the law. If it were so, God Himself would be a legalist, for He is the author of the law. The law is the transcript of His character. It is His definition of righteousness. When God charged Adam and Eve that the difference between life and death lies in their unconditional obedience to the law that He has spelled out for them, God was not being a legalist. The command “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:17)* did not arise from a stern legalist, but from a loving and gracious Creator who wanted to establish a relationship with His creatures on the basis of a love that chooses to respond in love.

It is not, of course, open for the creature to ask, “Why any law at all?” A creature shall always be a creature, and the Creator shall always be the Creator. The difference between the two is God’s sovereignty and a creature’s finiteness. The law reflects that sovereignty and delineates that finiteness, with limitations within which a creature shall exist and operate. Outside of that limit is death. The prescription of that limit does not mean legalism, but the preservation of order.

The codifying of the law on Mount Sinai is another illustration that the law reveals God’s character on the one hand and human folly on the other. The preamble to the law in Exodus is the mighty movement of God’s liberation of Israel from Egypt. He liberated a people, He created a community, and He gave them the law. The fact that God wrote the law with His fingers on tables of stone is a symbolic affirmation that the principles of the law are as enduring as God Himself. There’s nothing legalistic about the Ten Commandments, but it is the natural sequence to God’s gracious liberation and creation of a community whose very existence was expected to be on the basis of faith in this God of deliverance. But it is altogether a different matter that Israel identified its exclusiveness, not in the gracious calling of God, but in the possession of the tables of stone and thereafter went about through rabbinical interpretations to expand that law and make compliance to it the basis of righteousness before God. In the process because of their emphasis on what they could do on their own, they forgot where they came from, and rejected the grace that was responsible for their creation as a covenant community. That was Israel’s folly.
Thus legalism’s first victor is self enthroning itself and declaring its capacity to be its own god. And the corollary is true as well: Legalism’s first victim is faith in, and dependence on, God’s saving grace. Legalists deliberately and proudly announce to the universe that they have at last arrived. They are the captains of their souls and the masters of their fate. Legalism is therefore not the law; it is a form of false empowerment that manipulates and misrepresents the purpose of the law and claims self-sufficiency for the human. Legalism is self’s golden calf.

Legalism is not obedience to the law. If it were so, Jesus would be a legalist. Consider Jesus’ assertion and hope in John 14 and 15. The assertion is His relationship with the Father, and the hope is for the relationship of His disciples with Him. In the first, Jesus asserts, “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). The obedience of Jesus to the Father’s commandments is not a legalistic compliance, but an outgrowth of His abiding in the Father’s love. If Jesus had to “earn” the Father’s love through obedience, that would amount to legalism, but that’s precisely what Jesus wants His disciples to understand. The intimate relationship between the Father and the Son is based on love and love alone, and it is this love that led the Father to send the Son to the cross, and it is this love that led the Son to accept the Father’s will and taste the bitterness of Gethsemane and Calvary.

Jesus uses the Father-Son relationship of love that led to the ultimate act of obedience and sacrifice in cosmic history as an illustration of the kind of relationship His disciples should have with Him. The parallelism is perilous as well as promising. It is perilous in that the disciples could be tempted to see in it a challenge to their self-worth and pride, and set up a routine of obedience in order to abide in His love, placing obedience as preceding and essential to obtaining the love of Jesus. Placed in that setting, obedience usurps the place of grace, for it is grace that offers the privilege of discipleship in the first place. Moreover, such an obedience attempts to earn a place in the heart of Jesus. That kind of obedience is legalism, one that has no place in Christian discipleship.

But the promise in the parallelism is simply astounding, and it is to this promise that Jesus directs the attention of the disciples. Just as the relationship of Jesus with the Father preceded the obedience of Jesus to the Father, so should the relationship of the disciples with Jesus precede their obedience to Him. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (verse 31).

Christian discipleship has no room for either the heresy of legalism or the luxury of cheap grace.

Observe the hope Jesus has for His disciples. He does as the Father commanded so that the world may know His relationship of love with the Father. The love and the relationship precede the doing of the Father’s will. Obedience has not earned for Him a place in the Father’s heart. His place in the Father’s heart was already there and has made it natural for Him to obey. He loves His Father, and therefore willingly does His Father’s will. Likewise, Jesus anticipates a love foundation for His own disciples. “Abide in me,” He says, “as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me” (John 15:4).

Jesus seems to be saying to His disciples: “Don’t be a legalist like the Pharisees around you. Don’t fret yourself about fruits. Don’t draw a moral circle for your existence, and figure out each day whether you are within that circle or not. Don’t let yourself be pinned down by a set of do’s and don’ts in order to measure whether you have attained a particular ethical maximum. Don’t set yourself a merit scale whereby you can measure your own perfection and the imperfection of your neighbor, and look for the day when you can say you are good enough for heaven and it’s time for Me to return. That’s not My kind of discipleship.”

Christian discipleship is not achievement of a moral status, but reception of Christ’s calling; it is not moral perfection, but a constant abiding in Him. It is a love relationship with Jesus. Once that abiding is established, fruits follow as a natural course. The principle is a simple one: first love, then its fruits; first grace, then obedience. Obedience does not produce love; love produces obedience. Obedience does not bring about forgiveness; grace does that. Any attempt to distort the order inevitably leads to legalism. And in rejecting legalism, any bid to deny obedience its role in discipleship turns to cheap grace. Christian discipleship has no room for either the heresy of legalism or the luxury of cheap grace.

What legalism is

Legalism is a counterfeit way of salvation. Paul’s case against the Galatian heresy is a classic example of how some can perceive legalism as a way of salvation. “I am astonished,” says the apostle, “that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6, 7). The Galatians, who accepted the grace of Christ and joyfully entered into a salvation experience through faith in Him (Gal. 3:1, 2), were now in serious peril of losing that experience because somehow they were misled into a confusing situation as to the basis of salvation. The apostle asks, “Did you receive the Spirit by
Legalism increases the guilt, pushing the sinner even more to the sweat mills of works.

Legalism is the denial of the cross. Whatever form it might take, legalism eventually either denies or limits the power of the cross. Legalism always projects obedience as either the only way of salvation or the human part of it. The absolutist claim is routine to most non-Christian faiths, where emphasis on works, obedience, alms, a morally upright life, penance, and rituals are routinely prescribed as part of the path to salvation. The claim in subtler forms occurs in Christian communities in the form of either an ascetic withdrawal from a corrupt world or striving hard to achieve ethical performances with mathematical precision.

Even though the Bible proclaims that “if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:21), legalism attempts to hold its ground. Legalists would say, “We don’t deny the cross, but...” That “but” takes many forms, both alluring and dangerous, but in reality everything amounts to a denial of the cross. For example, consider the suggestion that obedience is cooperative with the will of God. There’s nothing wrong in the statement per se, but what’s behind it? Cooperating for what purpose? Is salvation a result of faith plus something? In the experience of salvation, is grace God’s part and obedience the human part? Legalism may not come out with a clear answer, but the end result of its stance is the denial of the all-sufficiency of the cross. The gospel does not permit any addition to the efficacy of the cross and faith in it; legalism would not admit the sufficiency of the cross or the formula of faith alone. And the gulf cannot be bridged. One either accepts the cross through faith or remains outside of the saving grace of God. The assertion of self to come somehow to the assistance of God in the accomplishment of human salvation is Satan’s tested way to confuse the simple message of salvation through faith alone. No wonder the apostle Paul angrily—yet lovingly—cries out, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (Gal 3:1).

**Guarding against legalism**

Legalism has the power to bewitch the unguarded soul into looking to good works as a way of salvation. The only safeguard for the Christian is to cling to the cross. For on the cross we see God’s supreme manifestation of love and grace toward the sinner. The crucified Jesus is God’s grace incarnate; the cross is God’s only way to rescue the perishing world, to redeem the lost sinner, and to return the prodigal home. The God of the cross makes no demand except “Come.” He loves us as we are. He does not look into any records of what we did do or what we could do. No amount of evil we have done can keep us beyond the reach of the cross, and no amount of good we have done can gain any merit at the cross. The Samaritan woman and Nicodemus alike need to come to the cross and accept what it offers in faith. Only then a new life is born, and the road of discipleship opens up with its limitless possibilities and surprises in growth—again through faith in Christ, who “strengthens” (see Phil. 4:13).

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*All Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version.*
Compassion versus confrontation

Dealing with sexual abuse in the church

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G o, and sin no more” (John 8:11), said Jesus to the woman accused of sin. He also admonished His followers to forgive “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22).

Can one say these to a sex offender in a church congregation? How can one be compassionate, forgiving, and kind to someone who sexually molest a child? If the molester is a first-time offender, should that make any difference? Some church members may want to forgive the offender; others, including the victim, may not, and the issue could well divide the church.

How do pastors handle such a situation? How do they deal with the perpetrator of abuse and still exhibit a loving, compassionate, and helpful attitude toward that person? Here are some helpful steps.

Step 1

Report the case to proper authorities. The law in most states requires that a professional who becomes aware of a sexual abuse incident report it to proper authorities. Even if the molestation occurs in a social situation, the professional is required to report it. In case of incest or a familial molestation, one should report it to the child protection agency. If the abuse occurs outside the home, reporting it to police as a criminal act will generally bring faster action.

Unfortunately, pastors sometimes feel they can handle an abuse situation without reporting, especially if the molester shows signs of remorse and asks forgiveness and the victim and/or family ask that it not be reported. The temptation not to report may be compelling, but when pastors succumb to this, they and their denomination may become liable for litigation. This is mistake number one. Mistake number two is believing that perpetrators will abide by their promise. Pastors cannot afford to succumb to either of these temptations. They should be aware of their state requirements and act legally, even as they work with spiritual compassion with those involved in the tragedy.

Step 2

Believe the child. Could a member of our congregation be a child molester? We want to believe that molesters are dirty, unkempt, surly, and uneducated, lurking in the shadows of the ghetto—not decent people who live on our street. Facts tell us otherwise. Only 5 percent of molestation is committed by complete strangers. Seventy-five to ninety percent of sexual molestation occurs in religious homes.¹

Research indicates another disturbing factor: the more religious, conservative, and fundamental a denomination, the more likely that molestation will occur in that denomination.² Frightening, isn’t it?

Believing the child places the pastor in the unenviable position of ac-
cepting the perpetrator’s alleged guilt. While it is not the pastor’s task to judge the innocence or guilt of the accused, assuming innocence of the child makes it easier for the pastor than telling the child that he or she is lying or at least fantasizing. Do we want to give the child the message that we believe the child is lying? Children rarely lie about being sexually abused. If a child lies, it is usually to state that sexual abuse did not happen. In fact, it is commonplace for the child to retract and deny the allegation once the magnitude of disclosure descends upon her or him.

Whether the child has been abused over a long period or for the first time, the offender makes the child feel like a partner in the act. When this happens, the child feels responsible for the molestation and that she or he is bad. A molested child already feels guilty, scared, lonely, and strange. Not believing the child adds to the trauma.

Often perpetrators of sex abuse try to convince the child that it is he or her fault. Therefore, the perpetrator goes to great lengths to impress upon the child that the act must ever remain a secret between them. The perpetrator wants to ensure this secrecy so as not to lose everything: family, job, security, status, and access to children. Actually, very few children self-disclose. Others may witness the molestation and report, or the child may accidentally disclose. Either way it is traumatic for the child, and when the child is not taken seriously, she or he feels betrayed by another adult in addition to the offender.

Traditionally we have thought that children experience trauma because of four things: age of child, length of abuse, violence, and penetration. However, recent research has shown that violence does not increase the trauma; rather it may help the victims to recognize themselves as victims and the offender as the criminal. Research also shows that when a child is not believed and supported, she or he suffers more trauma than otherwise.

Remember, the child almost always knows and loves the offender. It is difficult for us as adults to understand that a child continues to love someone who has committed such a disgusting act. But we must not only believe the child, but avoid implying verbally or nonverbally that the topic makes us uncomfortable. Children will regard any display of emotion on our part as criticism of their behavior in the abuse.

Step 3
Speak to the offender directly. However, caution is in order. Counselors, social workers, or psychologists, unless specializing in sexual abuse issues, have very little knowledge about the dynamics that whirl about the offender and the victim. Today counseling is a specialized field much like medicine. If a person has a broken leg, he or she would not choose a dermatologist to set the leg. Unfortunately, any endeavor to use pastoral influence to circumvent the legal process does not help the offender. The offender needs support, but that support would not choose a dermatologist to set the leg.

A molested child already feels guilty, scared, lonely, and strange. Not believing the child adds to the trauma.

Step 4
After reporting and confronting the offender, let the perpetrators know you will support them as they go through the legal process. Support doesn’t mean approval. Support means that you will be letting the legal process take due course, but that you will be there to pray with them and their families. Remember, Christ loved sinners, but did not approve of their actions.

Any endeavor to use pastoral influence to circumvent the legal process does not help the offender. The offender needs support, but that support...
should be stated as “I am sorry this has happened, but it will be in your best interest to go through the court process and get counseling as soon as possible.” Such a support is confrontation with compassion.

It may seem compassionate to shield the perpetrator because of family hardships. However, the victim, whether or not from the same family, should take priority in receiving compassionate care. Offenders are not cured, but they can be treated to recognize their deviant thinking errors and intercept the stimuli prior to acting out their desires. The offender must get specialized therapy that generally takes from two to five years, based on the restitution model. In my professional opinion the restitution rehabilitation model has the greatest chance of success, with the least relapse of any treatment available. It is a slow, tedious process that cannot be circumvented by confession and/or religion. Offenders often use a “new birth” experience to circumvent the trial process.

Therapy attempts to rehabilitate the mind, because it is the offender’s thinking errors that have led to molestation. While we should never discount the power of the Holy Spirit, God generally does not “wave a magic wand” when we get into trouble. God does not generally intervene, but rather helps us learn from our mistakes, if we would learn. Just as we would urge a person with a brain tumor to have surgery and not rely on a miracle for healing, we must urge sex offenders to go for counseling and treatment for deviant behavior.

Treating offenders is a step-by-step process. It begins with an assessment and a detailed history of the offender’s sexual deviancy. This is done through a series of assessment techniques, including, but not limited to the Minnesota-Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank, the Sone Sexual History Background Form, the Penile Plethysmograph, and the polygraph test. These tests will indicate which stimuli arouses the molester, as well as identify personality characteristics, social and emotional deficits, learning disorders, cultivated aberrant sexual fantasies, deviant masturbatory behaviors, thinking errors, and the overall denial patterns the perpetrators use to justify their behavior.

Step 5

Step 5 is not easy. It has to do with how to relate to a sex offender after the legal process is over. A court may acquit a person charged with sex offense or dismiss the case. This does not mean that the offender is innocent or that the molestation has not occurred. What it does mean is that our legal process is limited, that the evidence is inadmissible in court, or that the witness is too young to testify according to court standards.

Children are concrete thinkers. If a defense attorney asks a 6-year-old girl if the molester touched her and no touching occurred, the child will answer, “No.” A child cannot analyze what an attorney is asking. The 6-year-old answered the question as it was asked. She may have been shown pornographic photos or forced to watch as the offender masturbated. If the defense attorney does not ask if she watched the offender masturbate, she will not volunteer the information, because she cannot reason from cause to effect, or from concrete to abstract. Or if an attorney repeats a question, the child will often reverse the answer because the child thinks the first answer was wrong. This causes the jury to think the child is lying, whereas the child is answering like a child. Knowing this, many molesters prefer young children, because it is difficult to get convicted by the child’s testimony, and because many therapists make major mistakes in the initial sexual abuse interview.

Sexual molestation doesn’t require physical contact for deviant behavior to occur. Recent research indicates that a child can suffer extreme trauma from what adults call “just fondling her breasts.”

After the legal process is completed, regardless of the verdict the pastor’s task is to convince the congregation as a whole to accept the perpetrator back into fellowship in caring love, while recognizing that the perpetrator can never again be allowed to be alone with children.

For the perpetrators’ part, if they really want healing, they will not fight the court process. They will ask the congregation to help them stay away from children. Even if they are acquitted, the church, for no other reason than possible future litigation, should not place them in leadership or in positions in which they would interact with children.

Remember that offenders will always be “recovering.” They should not be placed where children are present. Many offenders, acquitted or found guilty, will as soon as possible begin “grooming” an intended victim. They will use the same tactics that led to the first incident: helpfulness, cheerfulness, joking, “horsing around,” and friendliness, designed to numb people’s sensitivities, thus providing the perpetrators an opportunity for interaction with children/teens. Whenever this happens, confront the offender. Make it difficult for them to interact with children. Confrontation with compassion should be the goal in step 5.

Such confrontation is needed to help molesters be aware of their problem and their thought patterns. The church should offer these offenders love, support, and a willingness to listen to them and their families. At the same time, the victims and their families must not be neglected in the church’s love and support systems.

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1 Anne Horton, The Incest Perpetrator (Sage Publications, 1990), p. 50.
4 Horton, p. 122.
6 Horton, p. 174.
7 Ibid., p. 159.
8 Ibid., p. 161.
9 Laws, p. 11.
10 Ian Hindman, Adult Sex Offender Treatment (Ontario, Oreg.: Alex & Andria Assn., n.d.).
12 Maletzky, p. 49.
13 Ibid., p. 47.
15 Laws, Relapse Prevention With Sex Offenders (Guilford Press, 1989), p. 5.
Foot washing: view from a shelter

Carol June Hooker

Two blisters popped as Richard’s feet slid into a pan of tepid water. “Nurse, my name isn’t really Kennedy. My family is ashamed of me, and I can’t go home. I escaped from a mental hospital and walked here to Washington.” Richard stayed coherent as long as his feet soaked.

A pair of men, both named Tyrone—one Black, one White—each with his enormous body squeezed into an armchair, each with fungus-cracked feet floating in a bucket of bleach water, spewed violent racial epithets across the cramped room. Moments later they laughed while sharing street survival strategies.

Another set of blistered feet, connected to a cowering 20-year-old, splashed into a pail of warm water. Their owner whispered, “George Bush isn’t really my uncle. But I did see the White House.”

I spent most of 1992 teaching and practicing community health nursing at the infirmary of a large homeless shelter in Washington, D.C. Most of my patients were addicted to drugs or alcohol or both, some were mentally ill, some were violent, and some had infections like AIDS or tuberculosis. None were safe to live with when they arrived at the shelter. Most had relatives nearby, but couldn’t go home even when seriously ill or injured.

Every time I washed a patient’s feet, the responses showed temporary positive mental health effects. No matter how deluded the patients ordinarily were (aberrations included claiming to be a member of a president’s family or Jesus Christ or a popular musician), while their feet were cared for in warm water, they were coherent. No matter how violent they were physically or verbally, they visibly relaxed while their feet were washed. I started foot care on a patient’s arrival at the shelter infirmary, simultaneously asking admission questions—name, address, and medical history—to get more accurate information. And I wondered why washing feet made such a difference.

A Catholic priest and two nuns who worked in a different part of the shelter reported the same effects. A psychiatric nurse clinician attributed the effects to the huge need of homeless people for nurturing. A visiting medical team from a nearby state suggested supernatural causes for the tranquilizing mental effects of foot washing they saw demonstrated. And I wondered what happened physically and psychosocially to people whose feet were washed by the hands of others.

Hydrotherapy, a text by Finnerty and Corbitt, calls foot washing a neutral temperature partial immersion bath with ablation. “Neutral” refers to water temperature between cool and warm (65-98 degrees F, 18.3-37.0 degrees C). Neutral baths have a sedative effect. Partial immersion bath identifies foot washing as bathing only the feet, which comprise about 10 percent of the total body sur-
face. Partial immersion baths affect not only the part of the body underwater, but also the whole body, depending on the temperature of the water. Abolition is washing the body by hand, rather than soaking or spraying. Ablution mildly stimulates nerve endings in the skin and deepens breathing. Because neutral temperature partial immersion baths with abolution are used either to treat local skin conditions (such as dirt, blisters, cuts, scrapes, or infections) or for their sedative effect (especially for exhausted people who cannot sleep or people whose mental illnesses interfere with rest), I wondered why Jesus washed His disciples’ feet while eating the Last Supper with them.

Biblical roots of foot washing

Bible references to foot washing before Jesus washed His disciples’ feet spoke of providing guests with water to wash their own feet, an act of hospitality, just as a host or hostess today invites guests to “freshen up.” There must have been some unusual circumstances in connection with the Last Supper to require Jesus to wash the feet of His disciples.

Luke 22 describes the Last Supper before Jesus washed feet to settle a dispute among the disciples, each of whom wanted to be the greatest, evidently an ongoing argument (see Luke 9:46; Mark 9:34). Perhaps this dispute differed only in degree from the claims of my homeless patients to be the “nephew of George Bush”, or “one of 200 clone children of John F. Kennedy”; or in verbal or physical violence only in degree from the abuse my homeless patients rained on each other. But in the midst of the turmoil accompanying 12 adults vying for greatness, Jesus got their attention. He washed their feet. Jesus used neutral temperature partial immersion baths with abolution to both relax and mildly stimulate His disciples and deepen their breathing. Jesus washed His disciples’ feet to refocus their attention from themselves to His important messages to them—and us. And I wondered why Jesus asked us to follow His example of washing another’s feet.

Some churches still wash feet

Many Christian groups follow the example of Jesus by observing a rite of foot washing. Roman Catholics emphasize the humility aspect of foot washing, as clergy wash the feet of poor laypersons on Maundy Thursday.4 John A. Hardon lists some Protestant organizations in America that observe foot washing: Seventh-day Adventists, Free-Will Baptists, Church of the Brethren, United Baptists, Mennonites, Apostolic Faith, Church of God, and Church of God in Christ. I contacted representative churches of these organizations in the Washington, D.C., area to discover how, why, and how often each practices foot washing.

The Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church practices foot washing quarterly, just preceding the Lord’s Supper. Men wash the feet of men, women wash the feet of women, or families wash one another’s feet. Feet are washed to provide a setting for the confession and repentance of sin—“including pride, rivalry, jealousy, resentful feelings, and selfishness”—so that the church can “come together” (see 1 Cor. 11) in a joyful spirit to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

The Bloss Memorial Free-Will Baptist Church practices foot washing quarterly in connection with the Lord’s Supper. The frequency of foot washing is chosen by the pastor for the needs of the church. Feet are washed to follow the humble example of Jesus in being a servant of servants.

The Washington Brethren Church practices foot washing twice a year, once on Maundy Thursday and once in October. Feet are washed to recall Christ’s example of humility and to facilitate the “coming together” (1 Cor. 11) needed for proper observance of the Lord’s Supper, giving no regard to rank, wealth, or social class. Foot washing is the third of the three parts of Communion: bread, wine, and water.

The Upper Room Baptist Church practices foot washing spontaneously as the Spirit moves, according to the needs of the congregation.

The Washington Community Fellowship with the Mennonite Church practices foot washing once a year as part of the Maundy Thursday service.

The Fisherman of Men Church of our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc., practices foot washing once a year at the New Year’s Eve watch night service. Feet are washed to symbolize the cleansing forgiveness of God so that church members may have a “clean start” for the new year.

The National Church of God formerly practiced foot washing on New Year’s Eve. Now feet are washed on an ad lib basis, according to the needs of the congregation.

The Holy Commandment Church of God, Seventh Day, practices foot washing every Passover, once a year, as Jesus commanded.

The Refreshing Spring Church of God in Christ practices foot washing every first Sunday, except in winter for health reasons, in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper.

Each of these churches practices foot washing with the Lord’s Supper observance, some more frequently or regularly than others. But foot washing may be useful as a tool for pastors in other settings, too. Foot washing may help relax and refocus partners in a warring marriage, or in a dispute between church members, or in cross-generational or cross-cultural conflicts. Foot washing, especially when carefully planned, may grab the attention of spiritually starved congregants long enough for you, their pastor, to point out evidences of God’s love for them.
A prisoner of Jesus Christ

Kima Jude

One housebound mother recognizes her ministry.

Where’s Daddy going?” Five-year-old Britt leaned against my leg as we both pressed our noses against the window and peered outside. A group of parishioners were gathered in the church parking lot next to our home.

“Daddy’s going visiting,” I sighed, surveying the crowd out there with the longing of someone on the outside looking in. “He’s going to tell people about Jesus.”

Meanwhile, I would be home as usual, caring for my four preschoolers. Normally, parenting is a role I find fulfilling, but this day I felt plagued by restlessness. I mused, How nice it would be to tell others about Jesus. But who’s going to knock on my door and ask me about Christ?

Actually, the group outside created their own opportunities. Their frontline mission was significant. When I married a minister, I pictured myself working side by side with him, doing my part to save the world.

Glumly I returned to the mundane task of folding laundry. Now this, I told myself dryly, is strictly support duty.

Of course, before I became a stay-at-home mom, I saw more action. But as the children came, one by one, I dropped out of active service. Even as the walls of my house closed in tighter, my desire to be actively involved in ministry expanded. Though I had Bible studies with my children and had a role in the church program, I was confined mostly in the house.

“Lord, how can You use me?” became my prayer each day as my husband drove away and I tended to my dreary little chores. Support duty had begun to pall. I wasn’t jealous of my husband; he was the pastor, and I was his helpmate. I didn’t want Barry’s job; all I longed for was that what I did for the Lord would count.

In church I often sang about being a soldier of the cross, but I began to feel more like a prisoner of war trapped within my own home. I felt restricted from a mission for Christ because of clawing shackles—the tiny hands of my young children. My dilemma was just a twist on a familiar problem—a conflict not between family and career, but in balancing family and service for God.

Or was that really the problem? Was my desire for frontline ministry truly God-given, or was it a quest for vain glory? If my motives indeed were pure, how could a God-given desire produce dissatisfaction, especially when I understood my first duty was with my children?

Trying to reconcile my desire with my dilemma, I searched the Scriptures for female role models. Wasn’t Priscilla right at Aquila’s side? Instead, I found parallels with Paul and John the Baptist, two prisoners of frontline war.

Did Paul chafe at being stuck behind bars when he had the enormous task of evangelizing the world? On more than one occasion he wrote of “longing” to be elsewhere. Was then...
Paul's jail time wasted and fruitless? 
Or how about John the Baptist, who paved the way for Christ only to languish in prison till he died?

A prisoner of Christ

Surely my desire to serve God pleased Him—but my discontent didn't, since He had ordained my situation. He had entrusted me with children, and the accompanying responsibilities limit front-line ministry. My attitude regained proper perspective when I saw myself not as a stay-at-home mother, but as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ."

Paul as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" continued to serve Him regardless of who physically shackled him. When imprisoned in Rome, he still had Christ for his Master. The apostle's servitude was never to the Romans; his Jailkeeper was Christ. If I likewise recognize Jesus as Master of my life, I can know that nothing is beyond His attention or control. Although it may seem that binding circumstances waste time, energy, and opportunity, the Scriptures present many examples of godly, chosen people in such situations. Daniel was a captive in a foreign land. Jacob for years was a slave. Seasons of restriction, whether temporary or permanent, mold the clay of our souls. Ultimately, "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31).*

Reconciling with restrictions

In my case, recognizing Christ as Master was the first step in accepting my restrictions. This was not one clean sweeping realization, but rather a hard-won process. It was also for John the Baptist. When Jesus first appeared on the scene, the faithful forerunner declared: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). It was an unforced act of deference from one who later struggled in accepting the bondage that ended his public ministry. As John rotted in jail, undoubtedly he dreamed about what he could be doing for Christ. Despair and doubt so tormented him that he sent messengers to Christ: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt. 11:3). Jesus didn't remove his shackles, but He gave John the affirmation He needed to accept his bondage.

Paul too struggled to come to terms with his "thorn in my flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). Even when reporting God's answer that His grace was sufficient to cover the thorn in His flesh, Paul's wistfulness rings through. He testified that he had learned to be content.

The core question we must ask ourselves in binding circumstances is Can Christ receive glory? Restraints sometimes come that we might glorify Christ: "I must become less," John said. And he did. Perhaps John was naive about the extent of his subjugation, but he understood it was necessary.

How often I prayed that Christ be glorified through my life, only to turn around and chafe at the restraints I faced along my way. The truth is, I didn't always seize opportunities already available. Now I learned to make the most of them. For example, when Jehovah's Witnesses knock on my door, I no longer send them away with a polite spiel about doctrinal differences. I take time to share Jesus as I know Him.

Realizing potential

Once reconciled with his bondage, Paul realized his potential within it. He even declared: "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil. 1:12). He wrote some great epistles from within a jail cell. He preached to guards and visitors alike. Although he remained imprisoned, one can sense his heart soaring with the feeling of accomplishment.

But what about John the Baptist? Did being marched off the scene to a vicious, cruel death mean he was just a falling star? Jesus didn't think so. "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). John, even while isolated in prison, away from the masses to whom he had preached, pleased God and realized his potential. This alone must have made his heart rejoice, even in his dark, dank, dirty dungeon.

As for me, who watched on the sidelines while my husband performed "front-line" ministry, I finally realized the potential within my limitations. At that point I sought ways to share Christ creatively where circumstances had placed me.

Like Paul, I do get opportunities to witness as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Paul took advantage of his audiences with Felix and Agrippa. He talked to his guards. Sometimes I get an audience with my child's friend or a repairman. I can still invite anyone I choose for a visit. Through prayer I can go all over the world without stepping out the door. It's from my own home, not some elusive place in the world, that I gather food and clothing to give to the poor. The seeds I sow and cultivate in my children constitute my most important ministry. And for those days, weeks, even months, that go by without one recognizable front-line opportunity, I remind myself of what Jesus said immediately after his remark about John the Baptist: "Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (verse 11).

Now, with some of my children in school and a church nursery to care for the others, opportunities are returning for outside ministry. But wherever I'm serving God, I always want to remain a "prisoner of Jesus Christ."

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* All scriptures in this article are from the New International Version.
If I were a minister again

Walter F. Wright

Having served as a minister for 20 years, a former pastor reflects on what he would do if he had another opportunity.

I f I were a minister again, I would set some objectives for myself. Nothing new, nothing startling, but they would give a new meaning to life and ministry. These objectives would not be exhaustive, but they would cover personal, relational, and professional aspects of a pastor’s life.

In my personal life, I would:

**Be honest.** There are ministers who believe they can get by with lies. We bring reproach on our Lord when we lie, or distort truth, or pass on unsubstantiated rumors. How many careers have been changed or destroyed by a careless remark in a committee! If we tell the truth, we don’t have to remember what we said.

**Learn to forgive, and practice forgiveness.** Since the church has a difficult time forgiving a minister, I would try to set an example. If we don’t practice it, what effect will preaching it have?

**Get my priorities in order.** The goal of ministry is not to get promoted to the conference office, or to get recognition for one’s self, or even to retire with a good income. It is the saving of souls for the Master.

**Personally practice obedience to God.** Then I can relate to the experiences of others who are doing the same.

**Use my time more wisely.** I would manage it, rather than become a victim of it. I would not prepare sermons on Friday night, or between Sabbath school and church.

**Not compare myself with other ministers.** I would forget about the “track to success” (whatever that is). Each of us is a unique individual with special talents. Like you, I have classmates in the General Conference. Asking ourselves “Why him and not me?” is a waste of time and emotional energy.

**Remember that the Lord said, “Come apart and rest a while,”** I usually “come apart” and then have to “rest a while.” The difference is important. The Lord has the Holy Spirit and angels to help do the work. We don’t have to do it all by ourselves. We don’t have to try it alone and lose our health.

**Not trade cars as often.** If I could have the money (and time) I lost trading cars, I would have more to show for my labors. We give a message to church members no matter how good a “deal” we got. I lost more than I gained when I was a principal and got a fantastic “deal” on a Buick Riviera. When I talked about sacrifice, nobody listened—but they did look.

**Be aware of the cost of my house and the neighborhood it is located in.** Many times I lived much better than most of my members. They noticed.

Walter F. Wright, a former pastor, is an administrator for Pacific Living Centers, Colton, California.
By high-style living, we give a distinct message that the Lord is not coming soon, and until He does, we want to be as "comfortable" as possible. And when the time comes to leave it all behind, we may not leave.

_Understand that I have a lot to do with my people’s tithing habits._ I hear the lament that members are sending their tithe to outside organizations or nonministerial church bodies. If this happened to me, I would fall to my knees and ask the Holy Spirit to show me how my methods and practices are causing the people to lose confidence in me and my ministry. I believe that when we are honest in all our dealings and relationships, and we are open and above board, the people will respond as "comfortable" as possible. And when we are honest in all our dealings and relationships, and we are open and above board, the people will respond with their financial and emotional support.

_Not allow my retirement to be the motivating factor in my work._ I realize retirement is important, but if everything I do is slated to foster my retirement, why should my members do better than I do? Ministers who preach the soon return of Christ but can’t wait to retire, get an RV, travel, and “have some fun” are a disgrace to the ministry.

_Listen to what is discussed at potlucks._ What do I talk about at potlucks? If conversations are centered on travel, interest rates, investments, cars, houses, sports, etc., it would seem that Jesus isn’t getting equal time.

_In my relational life, I would:_

_Accept my responsibility as a leader._ It is unbecoming a leader to make excuses, hide behind circumstances, and cop-out. We are stand-ins for Christ.

_Lead rather than push my people._

_Not make promises that I cannot or will not keep._ Nothing upsets a congregation more than the perception of broken promises. Our word is our bond.

_Spend time with my wife and children._ It is a tragedy how many minister’s children leave the church because of neglect and criticism. Need I mention the D word?

_Engage my wife’s services to minister to the women of the church._ No man can be all things to all people. A fringe benefit is less temptation.

_Communicate with my people._ If they know what I’m trying to accomplish, they may choose to help. But silence breeds suspicion. Some of us are accused of making a power play when, in fact, we are just the quiet type.

_Not embarrass anyone in the service(s) of the church._ No one should fear exposure or embarrassments in God’s house. Let the Holy Spirit do His work.

_Know my congregation by name._ Church too large? Plant another nearby! I received a call from a minister who said, “I think I missed you last Sabbath.” I’m sure he did. And maybe next Sabbath, too.

_In some churches if you want personal attention from the minister you have to have money, be politically important, or deathly sick._

_Spend time with the living._ What did Jesus mean when He said, “Let the dead bury the dead”? In some churches if you want personal attention from the minister you have to have money, be politically important, or deathly sick.

_Encourage people as well as challenge them._ Some members are barely hanging on. Should the church really shoot/destroy its wounded?

_In my professional life, I would:_

_Turn my church into a huge support group._ Everyone—singles, seniors, parents, youth, substance abusers, the poor—is in need of support, and the church can minister to them.

_Stop “using” my congregation to get ahead professionally._ The goals set by the church should be with soulwinning in mind, not promotions for the pastoral staff.

_Continually groom myself to keep my present job._ The greatest thing I can do for God is to be my best at what I am doing. I should be more nearsighted than farsighted. Ministers are subcontractors. God is the prime contractor.

_Reflect Christ in my ministry._ I would not let my own ego, arrogance, vanity, or pride take the place of Christ.

_Be in my own pulpit._ I would avoid too much running to and fro at tithepayers’ expense. How can I maintain a continuity in my church’s growth if I’m not there?

_Preach loving, practical, truth filled sermons._ Dr. E. C. Banks once told a public speaking class that “when there is a fire in the pulpit, the people will come to watch it burn.” There are many sermons that are no more than smoldering embers. And sometimes one suspects the minister is the one who is “smoldering.”

_Preach the Communion sermon at least a week before the service._ People may need time to write a letter or make a call or a visit. Let’s not drive them to leave during the break. Let’s help them get the blessing of the service. Don’t play any tricks. Have music in the sanctuary for those who choose neither to participate nor to leave.

_Strengthten moral values._ I do not have to experience sin to preach against it. What I read, how I am entertained, what I do, what I think do make a difference. I can trace trends in my life, as can we all. Spiritual death is usually not an instantaneous situation. It is a gradual decline caused by poor choices along the way. As a minister I am called to set a moral example to myself, my family, and my church.

_I wish I were the person I am describing._
Succeeding as an associate

Mark J. Molldrem

You don’t need to be the senior pastor to be both faithful and fulfilled.

Back in seminary, my fellow students would often warn each other about the difficulties of being an associate pastor. Having spent the 11 years of my ministry in that role, I can share from personal experience and observation how it is possible for a staff pastor to have a faithful and fulfilling ministry.

Dispelling the myth

Ministry is a gift from God, not a self-generated calling. Therefore, the significance of the role of staff pastor is predetermined by its relationship to the work of the kingdom—not by a concocted subservient relationship to a supervising pastor. By contrast, management in the world’s model exalts all blue-chip stars to top positions. Anything less is considered second best. The church, however, is a community dependent upon individuals working collegially, united in a common goal. All of us as ministers are interconnected as “members one of another” (Eph. 4:25; see also 1 Cor. 12).

John Donne observed that “no man is an island. . . . We are all part of the whole. Contemporary readings in Robert Bellah’s Habits of the Heart and Thomas Peters’ In Search of Excellence and A Passion for Excellence support this scriptural concept. As members of Christ’s body, we must remember that God calls us not to be individually “successful,” but to be faithful to Him and to one another. Any fruit from our labor is a blessing through the Spirit, not something necessary to impress others that we are living right. The martyrs of Christian history all bore witness to this truth. So can I, after years of ministry as a staff pastor. Whatever your own role is in the body of Christ, please consider my observations and suggestions.

The privilege of prayer

The greatest occupational and personal privilege we have is to talk with God and know He hears us. I daily pray for three personal blessings. First, for love, that I may reflect Christ in everything said and done. Second, for wisdom, that I may make the best choices for the sake of all with whom and for whom I minister. Third, for joy, that God will keep a bounce in my step, a smile on my face, and mirth in my heart as I experience the wonder of life: family, friends, work, and play.

I also pray for my colleagues. The apostle Paul set us an example in praying with thanksgiving for partners in the gospel. He bound his life with theirs before God, showing that colleagues in the church are not just co-workers but also “partakers of . . . grace” (Phil. 1:7). Together we stand before God in need of mercy. This unites us in a bond not easily broken.

The common good

One of the greatest temptations in ministry is to promote self or let others make us into an icon, or idol. This occurs when we imagine ourselves as the center of ministry and use occa-
sions for ministry to serve our own needs. To prevent this we must stay focused on the larger picture, namely the common good of Christ’s body. The question we should continually ask is How can what I do benefit God’s cause and His people? Keeping this in mind fosters a spirit of mutual discipleship rather than a selfish showcasing of one’s own accomplishments.

Task orientation

Many tasks need doing in maintaining the life of a congregation. Ultimately, it matters not who does them, but that they get done. Otherwise, individual egos become obstacles to effective ministry.

When I first began ministry, how important it was that my name appear in all the articles I wrote for the parish newsletter! I convinced myself that this was to allow the many people of our parish to know me as a minister. Actually, I was claiming my own turf among the other staff members, more concerned that people recognize my role than I was for their participation in the ideas or events I was promoting.

Now I want all ideas and events to stand out on their own as a symbol of life in the parish rather than as a feather in my cap. What a joy it is to be free from the need to claim and protect personal territory at the expense of staff relationships and parish programming! Indeed, it is more important that the ministry of the parish continue than to know who actually does the ministry.

Willingness to change

Adaptability is a vital asset in a staff pastor. Pastors tend to enter a situation with their minds set on how things should be done. This leads to conflict and possible alienation. However, if one approaches any situation with a willingness to change, it is amazing what can come of it. Remember the famous serenity prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Divine wisdom guides us in adjusting our own expectations or intentions as the situation requires. Often in a staff ministry, what works is a combination of everyone’s ideas and efforts. The staff pastor has to be willing to change from a solo, Lone Ranger mentality to that of a team player.

In the 1991 Top Gun Air Force competition, the leading pilot, Lieut. Col. Ron Hall, gave up the best airplane to a team member who needed better equipment to improve his score. This unselfish act cost Hall the individual Top Gun award but enabled his team to take top honors in the overall competition. This brings to mind Paul’s admonition to “build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11, RSV)—not one’s own prestige or position, but the church team.

Wisdom accepts one’s limits, and treasures loyalty and harmony more than individuality and even authenticity.

Loyal support

Loyalty is vital in a multistaff ministry. As partners in the gospel, all staff members must support one another both privately and publicly. Elements are always present that tend to drive wedges among staff members. Such political power plays are defused when church leaders covenant to talk all matters through “in staff” before going to the congregation. Then the team can work with the congregation in unity and effectiveness.

For the staff pastor, loyal support may mean deference to the senior pastor. Wisdom accepts one’s limits, and treasures loyalty and harmony more than individuality and even authenticity. In turn, the wise senior pastor understands the mutuality of these virtues.

Maximizing opportunity

One advantage of a staff position is that it allows a pastor to specialize, at least to some extent. God has opened doors that I never would have anticipated or even desired as a senior or solo pastor. But as I listened to the Spirit’s prompting by entering those doors labeled “chemical rehabilitation,” “singles,” “domestic violence,” and “youth,” my ministry has blossomed.

I also have had the privilege of pursuing continued education through an extensive Doctor of Ministry program. This has vitalized me and raised the level of my competence in ministry. Had I wished for a different role in this or some other congregation, it would have been poor stewardship of my circumstances. I’m eager to see how God continues to mold me in years to come.

Secure in Christ

Being grounded in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ provides us with a personal identity and sense of value. Nobody ever can rob us of these gifts from God, but we can squander them ourselves by seeking security in what we do instead of who we are in Christ. We are first and foremost children of God in Christ, named and claimed by the Almighty Himself. God has put a value on us as individuals that no role or office can exceed. Paul puts it like this: “Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30, NIV). Secure through our position in Christ, we can invest ourselves in our work, knowing that God has vested us with the honor and privilege of having Him as our Maker, Redeemer, and Comforter.

A final word: All of the above does not create some magic formula. The life of staff pastors is not easy, but it certainly can be fulfilling. Ministry happens anywhere we find ourselves. The core question is not “Are we doing what we want to be doing?” but “Are we doing what God wants us to be doing?” And when we let Him design our ministry, we will enjoy the unfolding of His plan throughout our years.
The bus ride

John Roberts

Jesus has taken the bus ride, and He knows the pain of our separations and sufferings.

My heart was beating so hard that I looked around to see if anyone else could hear it. It was question-and-answer time in a seminary class called Doctrine of Christ. Everyone focused upon the professor as he paced back and forth in front of the room. Like a tiger paces in a cage, I thought. I wanted to keep my question to myself, but something compelled me to raise my hand.

We had covered the different views regarding the nature of Christ, and I had remained relatively quiet. But as our discussion turned to the cross, I was determined to understand something that had remained a mystery for years. What actually happened to the divinity of Jesus when He died on the cross?

Immediately the professor called on me. The question seemed to leap out of my mouth, but attached to my question was an absurd suggestion that caught even me by surprise: “Is it possible that divinity could have died on the cross?”

There was an immediate and noticeable silence in the room as the professor paused. He walked slowly to my desk at the front of the class and bent down until his face was just above my face. His answer was more direct than the question. “If you had done your reading, you would know that divinity could not die.”

I had read the statements. With certainty I believed Jesus was human “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). I also believed Him to be fully God, the one and only “I Am” (John 8:57, 58). With those two realities firmly in mind, I also knew deep in my heart that He had actually died. “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). So what happened to the divinity of Jesus when He died on the cross?

As I asked myself this question and pondered my previous humiliation, I wondered something else. What difference does it make that divinity could not have died? Does this really have any relevance to me personally or to my relationship with God?

I made a decision to study this in further detail. If necessary, I would stay up all night studying and praying.

As the morning sun began to illuminate the room with all of my books, commentaries, and papers strewn about, I realized that not only was the room a complete mess, but I myself was totally confused. Questions replayed themselves again and again in my mind as I struggled to remain awake. Along with my questions there was a recurring memory that seemed to grow stronger the more it was ignored. Oddly enough, it had to do with a bus ride.

The bus and the little boy

Again and again the portrait of a
bus and a little boy would emerge in my mind, and immediately I would suppress it. Certainly my problem was nothing more than a lack of understanding the cross and the nature of Christ, which had nothing to do with a bus or a child. But this memory seemed strong and persistent in my thinking. After one more season of prayer and one more attempt at comparing scriptures, I sat back exhausted. Apparently this was a mystery I would never understand, at least not until I reached heaven.

As I closed my eyes and tried to imagine the cross for the last time, the bus came into view once again. I prayed, “Lord, I am Your child, and I understand, at least not until I reached heaven. Only this was a mystery I would never understand, at least not until I reached heaven.”

I immediately recalled a memory that had not entered my mind for 25 years. But why should I remember it now? As I began to replay what had happened years ago I sensed God’s reassuring presence in the room. Only then could I gaze into the deepest pain of my own past. Only then could I begin to see the experience of divinity and the mysterious reality of what actually took place on the cross.

The bus rides had been unavoidable. When I was five, my parents divorced, and consequently my mother and I moved far away from my father. I would not see or hear from him all year until the beginning of summer. When summer vacation began, I was always placed in a bus to travel the 500 miles to see my father for our annual visitation.

Although these temporary visits seemed short, they were good for me and my father, as we would spend enough time together to fall deeply in love all over again.

As a child I would have described my father with words like “big” and “tall,” but he was much more. He was actually a quiet man who always seemed gentle and kind. When it came to discipline, he never needed to lay a hand on me; just one look was sufficient to adjust even my most aberrant behavior. I was glad because his hands were the big hands of a tractor mechanic.

I remember one particular summer day when those hands released my twisted foot from the spokes of a friend’s rear bicycle wheel. I can still see my friend’s eyes as my father squeezed the spokes and they bent and snapped from around my ankle. He picked me up like I was a sack of feathers and took me home cradled in His arms.

But in spite of the time spent together and the way our love would always return, there was a hidden reality in the back of our minds. The day would come when we would have to say goodbye.

One of those goodbyes was so painful that I blocked it completely from my memory. But suddenly it was all becoming so clear; it was like reliving the incident for the first time.

As my memory began to replay in detail, the palms of my hands turned moist and warm. I was tempted to avoid the pain and keep the past entombed in the dark recesses of my memory, but God had something far more important to reveal.

I was then eight years old. My father’s eyes were red and swollen from a sleepless night as we drove to the bus station in silence. I had never seen my father cry, and I was determined this departure would be the first without my tears. It was just before dawn, but it seemed to be darker than dark as we drove along.

At the station my dad stood between me and the bus, with his back casting a giant shadow along its silver side. The familiar smelly fumes were filling the air. As the bus driver stepped down and leaned out of the bus door, he looked at me, then looked up at my father. When he was sure he had our undivided attention he looked at his watch. The hour was undoubtedly at hand.

My father stooped down, and I wrapped my arms around his neck for the last time. I told him, “I don’t want to go, Daddy.” I tried to hold back the tears and ignore the pain in my throat, but the ache of separation overwhelmed me as my father placed his head upon my shoulder and his hand behind my head. He tried to wipe away my tears, but this only increased their flow. Then he whispered, “It’s time.” He picked me up and carried me to the bus door.

He carefully set me down on the bottom step. He stooped down, his face again even with my face. He hugged me tight one last time and whispered again, “Don’t ever forget that Daddy loves you.” I looked away from his bloodshot eyes by staring at his fingertips as they moved slowly away from my own hands.

As I turned and stepped into the bus I met the impatient eyes and furrowed brow of the bus driver. I wanted to turn back and rush through the door into my father’s arms. But as I turned around, the door hissed and slammed shut in my face. I slowly stepped back into the aisle, then walked quickly down through the darkness with my head bowed, trying to avoid the impatient stares of the other passengers.

There was a single window seat on my father’s side. There I could see him standing outside, directly below my window. He paced back and forth, gazing up into the dark tinted windows with his hand over his brow. He could not see me. The bus began to move. I placed my hands on the window and began to cry for him, “Daddy, I’m here, I’m here,” but my voice was consumed by the snarl of the diesel engine.

On the verge of panic, I walked fast...
at the front door. It was no use; we were moving into the street. Unable to contain myself, I now ran back down the aisle. In the seat again I pressed face and hands against the cold tinted window, straining to capture one last glimpse of my father. As the bus turned the corner there was a single moment forever frozen in an 8-year-old mind. In the distance appeared a portrait of my father I immediately buried deep within me. He was standing shrouded in the darkness, but he was no longer looking for me. His head was bowed. His big hands covered his eyes.

Tears began to flow warm as the full impact of this bus ride hit my mind. I did not realize how much I missed my father. Our last goodbye was not long after that bus ride. He died from cancer while I was still a child, and I was not able to be with him in the end. I did not cry at his funeral, but instead bottled up the pain. It was too great for the heart of a child already wounded from too many goodbyes.

**Divine anguish**

But now the tears were flowing free. The healing tears of gratitude and love to God. A light seemed to fill the room as I finally understood. I suddenly realized it was true: divinity did not die on the cross. But divinity had suffered, a suffering of supreme anguish that was far worse than any death. Seeing the One we love the most suffer so terribly is the most painful suffering of all. Jesus had boarded a bus of this kind when He endured the cross, and He too was separated from His father’s loving presence.

Warmth poured into my heart from God because I realized for the first time that He understood all that I had been through. He not only bore my deepest pain, but by enduring the cross, He climbed aboard His own bus willingly and for me personally. “Divinity could not die” suddenly became more than a simple statement of intellectual fact; it brought home to my heart the healing power of God’s love.

How wonderful that Christ has the power to take the pain from all of our bus rides and separations, and exchange them with the promise of His eternal presence and hope. Through the miracle of His love we are not overwhelmed, even though our closest loved ones have suffered and died. Because the divinity of Jesus endured the cross, there is the hope of holding again those to whom we have told goodbye. This reveals to our hearts the miracle of all miracles, the reality that God has hands too. Big hands of unconditional love and saving power. Hands that will soon pick us up, cradle us in His arms, and take us home where we belong. To a home where tears will be wiped away as we laugh until we cry, because we are overwhelmed with the eternal reality that makes meaningless all our goodbyes.

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**Victory over sin is yours!**

**Conquering the Dragon Within**

by Marvin Moore

From the day the dragon was cast down to earth, he has been trying to win the world. As the final showdown between Christ and Satan approaches, can we ignore our own battle?

Conquering the Dragon Within is a pointed reminder to Christians living in the end time that the dragon slayer lives! Author Marvin Moore draws on the counsel of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the Twelve-Step recovery program to equip us with strategies and courage to conquer the dragon within.

Don’t wait for the final crisis to begin; get Conquering the Dragon Within today at your local ABC, or call toll free 1-800-765-6955.


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A sermon is one of the most important parts of the Sabbath worship hour. It brings the Word of God to His people. It mediates a message, offers comfort, directs lives, and shows meaning for the present as well as the future. Yet often the sermon hour becomes a period of boredom to the parishioners. How do you infuse life into your sermon? How do you make your preaching come alive for your people? How do you introduce change without alienating those who resist change? In his book *Present Truth in the Real World*, Jon Paulien suggests six areas in which any pastor can introduce vitality to the worship service, particularly the preaching part, without arousing the wrath of those who resist change.

**Language**

Use simple, newspaper-style language. Everyday words communicate your faith in a language everyone can understand and in a manner that holds the attention of your listeners. While there are about 40,000 words in English, only about 8,000 of those words comprise the basic language of everyday life. Do not assume that people will understand words beyond this basic vocabulary. In fact, whenever newspapers and magazines use such words, they define them. If you cannot translate your message into simple language, perhaps you don’t understand it yourself.

Don’t use theological jargon. Avoid code words that may be loaded with meaning for those within the subculture but have little or no relevance to everyday life.

**High take-home value**

No one will be offended if your sermons have a practical emphasis that makes a difference to their real world. What you say on Sabbath should deal with where your members will live the rest of the week. Before preaching any sermon, determine what you want your hearers to do about it next week. Expect them to act upon your message and present it in a way that shows them how.

**Excellence**

About 100 hours of work go into every minute of broadcast advertising. What excuse do you have for throwing a worship service together at the last moment or cobbling a sermon together the previous night? If you come to Friday and have nothing to preach, you are unlikely to find inspiration in the few hours of desperation that await you. Plan ahead and put your best into your sermons. If you ask 100 people to give you an hour of their attention, perhaps you should spend several hours in preparation.

**Attention-grabbing**

Societal trends make it increasingly difficult to keep listeners’ attention. Television watchers channel-surf by clicking the remote control about every three to five seconds in search of something that will grab their attention. If you don’t focus people in the first moment or two, you have lost your audience. They might as well physically leave, because they will have “checked out” mentally. Use catchy titles, advertise your sermon topics, provide outlines with fill-in blanks, and place your message in the most appealing setting possible.

**Strong spiritual tone**

People want to know how to know God. Propositional truth is not sufficient to keep people. Show your audience how to apply the message of Scripture to their daily life. Most former members still believe doctrines. They long to see these truths applied to their personal situation. Point people to Jesus and to His gift of salvation. Preach the cross and the Second Coming. Tell people how to find God’s grace and to prepare for His return!

**Genuine authenticity**

The pulpit has no room for phoniness. Does our practice match our profession? Today people are looking for something more than just “going through the motions” of worship. Discerning people are looking for that which is genuine. If we are going to “talk the talk,” we must “walk the walk.”
An Inside Look at the Willow Creek Worship Service: Building a New Community; An Inside Look at the Willow Creek Seeker Service: Show Me the Way


Willow Creek Community Church, located in South Barrington, Illinois, has long been a leader in innovative worship services and evangelism of the unchurched. Recorded live, these two videos show two different types of services offered at Willow Creek: one targets the believer and the other the unchurched (the seeker’s service).

Both services begin with 30-40 minutes of praise songs, creative readings, and/or drama built around a well-planned theme that introduces the day’s message. The seeker’s service uses more special music and less congregational singing and, unlike the believer’s service in which the congregation stands during the praise time, those at the seeker’s service stand only during the last song and are told to sing only if they want to.

At the seeker’s service, the worship leader introduces the sermon theme and incorporates a contemporary reading of the Scripture passage in his or her remarks, rather than have the visitors turn to the text. During the offering appeal, the leader tells visitors, “You are our guests. Please don’t feel obligated to take part. This service is our gift to you.”

The main difference between the two services is the sermon section. The seeker’s service deals with basic Christian issues, while the believer’s service deals with more in-depth Bible themes. Both services use a variety of elements and formats to avoid predictable and boring programs.

Vitally important in understanding this type of evangelistic outreach to the unchurched and the format of the believer service are the discussions at the end of each video. These help the viewer understand the philosophy behind the services and what the leaders hope to accomplish.

I found the guidelines that Willow Creek uses in choosing their praise songs especially helpful—songs must be easily singable and lyrics biblically true and authentic.

Any pastor or church leader involved in planning and leading a worship service will find an abundance of helpful ideas in these two videos.

Church, State, Morality, and Law

How is a Catholic expected to vote on certain types of issues involving morality and law? Hannon's book is a response to this question, studied within the context of the Catholic community in Ireland. A professor of moral theology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland, Hannon's reasoned response goes far beyond the confines of his own religious tradition. He commands attention, interest, and respect as he lays out with consummate clarity the perplexing social issues that confront Christians who take their faith seriously.

How do we act as responsible Christians when faced with moral issues such as pornography, discrimination against women, racial prejudice, homosexuality, abortion, adultery, divorce, remarriage, and war? Should Christians work to prohibit by legislation activities with which they disagree? Can or should a majority religion seek to restrain by law those who engage in activities which it believes are immoral and work against the law of God and the natural order? Is it possible to restrain immoral behavior by law? These are issues to which the Christians living in a pluralistic society should give consideration.

Professor Hannon's book is a pioneering effort. His conclusions deserve the attention of Christians and non-Christians alike. We may not agree with all his positions, but we are certainly challenged to a deeper and truer Christian behavior and belief. "Christian engagement with social issues," concludes the author, "can never be seen as merely modish, and if modern experience is forcing a special emphasis on this dimension of the Christian's call one can only be glad and grateful."

The Mustard Seed Conspiracy

This is a dangerous book. It's subversive, and if too many people read it, it will ruin the way we do church.

Sine's premise is that God chooses to change our world not through earthquakes, wind, and fire of large institutions or massive church programs, but through the still small voice of His Spirit working on the hearts of individual Christians who willingly follow wherever He leads.

Written in 1981, it appears at first to be dated. Some predictions made early on (particularly those dealing with the economy) have not come to pass because the author could not foresee the tremendous change in the world's balance of power that took place within the past few years. Because of this, the reader is tempted to lay the book aside, believing it is irrelevant. Go ahead and do that if you are among those wanting to keep things the way they are. On the other hand, if you tend to be subversive and enjoy upsetting the status quo, I urge you to read on.

Throughout the book Sine calls Christians of North America to reject what he terms American "civil religion"—the idea that "economic and political progress would inevitably result in moral progress for the whole society." In this "American religion" the autonomous individual, not God, sits at the center of the new order and the new faith. This "religion" has developed to the point, Sine argues, that God's primary function is "insuring that American Christians have a life free from inconvenience—that they never have to drive around the block twice or sharpen a pencil." And this while children are starving elsewhere. Sine calls for us to realize that the American party is over.

More than half the book is devoted to sharing stories of Christians who take the challenge of Christ seriously. Examples are given of Christians who find ways to "downsize" their lives to free more time, money, and resources for the "invasion of this earth by [His] kingdom." We are called, Sine says, to model together the right-side-up values of Jesus, even when that means going against the values of the dominant culture.

Taken seriously, this book would drastically change us and help us overcome our "edifice complex" and our desire for praise and adoration. It
would help us realize that “God is not looking for armies of outstanding Christian leaders. He is just looking for a few ordinary Christians, a few mustard seeds.”

From the perspective of business as usual in our contemporary Christian worldview, this book is nearly as subversive as one with a much older copyright date, one we call the Bible.

The chapter, “How Do You Know if You Need Help?” is worth the price of the book. It offers a checklist to help identify addictive patterns and warns that a thing or activity becomes addictive “when it alters your mood, if it provides a distraction from emotional pain, if you cannot stop it when you try, and if it takes up increasing amounts of your physical and mental energy.”

You develop an addiction when something provides temporary relief from pain and you indulge yourself repeatedly to experience that relief. This results in an inability to control or stop what you are doing to gain relief, which in turn produces despair, guilt, and shame. You seek relief from the pain by repeating the addictive behavior or activity. The cycle is set.

How do you know if you have an addiction? And if you have, how do you overcome? In clear, brief, well-written chapters the authors lead you through the process of discovery and recovery. You find answers to such questions as “What is your addiction?” “What set the addiction up?” “Where did your problem come from?” “Are your friends contributing to your problem?”

The only thing I can think of that would keep one from getting help from this book is denying that one needs help.

Crisis Counseling: What to Do During the First 72 Hours

Among conservative Christians H. Norman Wright is a respected name. His books on marriage, premarital counseling, and communication are well accepted as presenting biblically based Christian advice. Crisis Counseling is no exception. Written for ministers and lay counselors, the book gives a good introduction to counseling from a Christian perspective.

After two chapters of general introduction and two on the biblical perspective, Wright devotes seven chapters to intervention techniques in specific crises, such as suicide, death, and various types of stress. The book concludes with a chapter on Scripture,
prayer, and referrals. An appendix deals with the legal question of privileged communication and provides a sample form for assessment.

The strength of the book is in its practicality. The author does not spend a lot of time on theorizing, but focuses on the “what” and “how.” He frequently uses examples from the Bible and his own experience to illustrate his points. He also provides numerous tools such as charts, inventories, lead phrases, and questions that can be helpful for pastors and lay counselors.

Some readers may be disappointed with Wright’s tendency to state the obvious. His method of organizing his material is not very convincing. The book has no index or bibliography. Nevertheless, for the pastor and the lay counselor without specific training in crisis counseling this is a good, easy-to-read, biblically oriented, and practical book. I warmly recommend it.

Salvation in one word

From page 5

would then be dependent on Jesus. With all his possessions he lacked nothing. Anything he needed he bought. If he sold everything, suddenly he would become dependent on another person, Jesus. That was too much for him. He was not willing to make that kind of sacrifice.

The message of Jesus in Matthew and John is the same dependence. Whether it was being a little child, selling everything, drinking food and liquid, the message of Jesus was always the same. The essence of salvation can be reduced to one word—dependence. Dependence on Jesus from beginning to end. Dependence on the cross, His death, and resurrection. Dependence on His work for me. Dependence on His work in me. God does not accept partial surrender. He is a jealous God. He wants all our affections, all our devotion, all our mind, all our talents. He wants our whole being. Salvation is living every minute of every day totally dependent on Jesus.

Because of His death for us, because He gave everything for us, we give everything back to Him. We live a life of joyful obedience.

When traveling on an airplane, I am totally obedient to the pilot. I put on the seat belt, make sure my seat is upright, refrain from smoking, watch the flight attendants give their instructions. Throughout the flight, if the pilot says to return to my seat and buckle up, I do. I am completely obedient to that pilot. My life is in that person’s hands. I am totally dependent on the pilot’s skill. If I am willing to give that kind of control and obedience to a fellow human, why should I not give as much to my Lord and Saviour? Obedience is never the way to heaven. Obedience is the necessary fruit found in those who are living lives of total dependence on God.

Unlike the airplane pilot, whom I do not know but whom I obey, I know my heavenly pilot, and I obey because I know Him and love Him and know that He knows me and loves me. And living a life of dependence is never a duty, but a privilege. It is a life full of joy and peace.

*Scripture passages are from the New International Version.*

A hen and her chicks

From page 4

A CURE FOR BLINDNESS!

Laodicea

by Jack Sequeira

Poor, miserable, blind, and naked! A pathetic condition for anyone—but for a church? Could Christ truly be speaking about your church and mine? About you and me?

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A hen and her chicks

From page 4

together safely. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”

Observe that key phrase—“and ye would not.” It isn’t that the Lord didn’t do enough for us. He did all He could. We could make the choice—but “we would not.” He couldn’t do any more. And He doesn’t blame Himself for not doing more. He has no reason to.

Jesus is our pastoral example. We must stop slapping ourselves for other peoples’ choices—choices we would not have made and would have tried vainly to prevent them from making. Release them to Jesus. He cares about them more than we ever possibly could. Continue to pray for them, love them, and keep contact with them. Meanwhile, continue to look forward to those still searching for the risen saviour. “What if’s” will only drag you down and an effective ministry with it.
Participatory preaching
For variety in your sermons, invite volunteers to read aloud the texts cited. Have a roving mike ready. To avoid monopolizing by a few extroverts, consider dividing the congregation into sections. Call on one reader from the balcony, then another from the left aisle, one young man, then one adult woman, a visiting guest, and then someone who brought a friend. You also might invite a given number of the audience to come forward, and hand each a card with their individual text and the number of their turn. To ensure participation, you can share these cards beforehand.—Lael Caesar, Montemorelos, Mexico.

Another look at the good Samaritan
The story of the good Samaritan is a parable. In the everyday world people do not always have such honest needs as the poor soul beaten and robbed. In our area we have emergency shelters, food kitchens, food pantries, and emergency medical facilities. For people who approach our church wanting help beyond these services, we have a questionnaire to assess their true needs and know how best to use our resources.

Only two people have ever bothered filling in and returning the form. Some walked out when I advised them we would seek to verify their need. Others gave fictitious information. The usual motivation for such avoidance and subterfuge is addiction, of course. Addicts often are articulate in their narration of purported emergency situations. I’ve also observed that the more inopportune the time, the greater the likelihood of a hoax. Those who demand immediate funds two minutes prior to the church service usually have a calculated design.

The extent of our evaluation process depends upon the nature of the emergency. Occasionally a few phone calls are sufficient to determine the legitimacy of need. Whether or not we provide funding, we always offer assistance in budgeting and credit planning.—Henry W. Speidell, Paterson, New Jersey.

Beating stress
Create an imaginary place in your mind to retreat to in meditation. Practice rhythmic breathing. Get—and stay—physically fit.

Singing is one of the best ways to stay relaxed. This may be why so many good ideas originate in the bath or shower. Try singing regularly, in many different places.

Designate Pamper Day with your mate. Take turns one day each month doing whatever the other one wants—no matter how preposterous.

Schedule family “Quiet Time” each day—a period when the whole household is quiet. Eliminating TV, radio or loud activity can help reduce stress and conflict.

Helpful: Plan a quiet activity that the whole family can enjoy together.
Examples: reading . . . meditation . . . prayer . . . exercise . . . massage.—Rev. Dr. Dan Tohline, Jonesboro, LA

Reaching and keeping youth
Have a night when youth hold their own service, with one or two adults supervising while the rest have a prayer meeting. Also, ask for youth volunteers to do odd jobs or chores for the church. (This makes them feel a needed part of the church family.) Another idea is organizing youth in visitation teams to see members who are ill, perhaps even in the hospital.—Manfredo Ruiz, Jr., Blythe, California.

Affirmation Notebook
Affirming your members can become a systematic weekly ministry to encourage them and bind their hearts to yours. Here’s a plan that works for me: I have a notebook in which I write my prayer requests and keep a record of my daily Bible study. At the back of this notebook I have divided the pages into three columns, a smaller column on the left for the date, with the other two columns equally spaced on the remainder of the page.

Down the left hand column I list the weeks of the month. In the second column I list the names of the people to whom the Holy Spirit impresses me to send notes of affirmation, with a note in the third column indicating what I had affirmed these people for.

I have found that a greater impact is made if the affirmations are sent through the post, rather than being handed to the person.—Ritchie Way, Auckland, New Zealand.

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