

VOICE

AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH JOURNAL • JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2016

Transformed
Not Conformed



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Contents

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 7 Transformed, Not Conformed | Les Lofquist
- 11 Why A Pastor's Spiritual Life Matters | Matt Haste
- 13 How To Make An Effective Preacher | Author Unknown
- 14 A Word-Filled Life | John Barnett
- 18 Going Rogue | Paul Seger
- 20 What Is A Toxic Leader? | Kenneth O. Gangel
- 28 Islam: Comparisons, Contrasts, Contradictions | Fred Plastow
- 31 Water Baptism in a Middle East Context | Hanna Shahin

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 34 Discipling Children
- 35 Women's Voice
- 36 Fellowship News
- 37 New Members
- 40 Death of His Saints
- 41 Community Care

Transformed, Not Conformed



Les Lofquist
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

These are desperate days. We pastors know there is something radically wrong with our culture. We are commanded to take God's truth into this sin-sick world, and we are quite eager to obey. Stimulated by conscience and even outrage, however, we are all too often tempted to dive into the problems confronting our world before spending the appropriate amount of time in the Word and prayer. It just seems more compelling to run quickly into the frenzied battle, and so we do.

Like everyone else, pastors face the daily bombardment of our culture's hate and greed and violence and arrogance and indulgence and unquenchable lust for gratification. And so we seek to make a difference in this spiritual war. But our only hope is to be daily transformed by the Spirit and the Word, fighting conformity to the world while walking in the Spirit. Like Romans 12:1-2 commands us, we pastors need to be transformed, not conformed.

I believe that before we can ever be effective in our congregations and communities, pastors must passionately pursue our own spiritual maturity through a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to consistently cultivate our relationship with God so that in every aspect of our lives we demonstrate our intimacy with Him. We need to become increasingly God-centered, Christ-like and Spirit-empowered. We need to do the quiet work of Bible reading and meditating and praying so that we can lead others out of the depth of our own spiritual communion with Christ.

I want to be involved in a growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ, maturing in my own spiritual walk. I desire to know Christ (Philippians 3:10) and to experience His supernatural power in my soul as I read and meditate on His Word.

But this kind of maturing will take time

to nurture, just like it takes time to nurture a robust harvest from our gardens. A vibrant and transformative relationship with God isn't accomplished on the run, but rather it is only accomplished through disciplined, deliberate, devoted time in the Word and prayer and communion with God. We must deliberately detach ourselves from the noise of the day and devote ourselves to the truth of God in His Word. We need to immerse ourselves in Bible study, spending hours reflecting over its meaning, grappling with its historical setting and grammar and accurate interpretation. We need to quietly allow God to change us before we rush off to the demands of this world.

*We need to consistently
cultivate our relationship
with God so that in every aspect
of our lives we demonstrate our
intimacy with Him.*

The pastor who looks for quick results after sowing the seed of the Word will be disappointed. If you want tomatoes and cucumbers for a dinner salad tomorrow night, it does little good to go out and plant the seeds and seedlings tonight. There must be long stretches of quietness and darkness and cultivating and nurturing between when you plant and when you reap.

Pastors need to sow the seed...and wait. This is true whether in our public ministry or in our own private lives.

DANGER OF FAMILIARITY

I walked past a bakery window and the sights and smells spun my head around. I was thrilled seeing that magnificent display of oven-fresh

donuts, cupcakes, cookies and other assorted baked goods. I walked in. But I couldn't make up my mind what to order, so I began stalling by asking the woman behind the counter if she ever grew tired of donuts.

She told me that she no longer had a taste for them. She doesn't eat them anymore and had no desire to do so. Over time, the familiarity and easy availability deadened her senses to those amazing pastries. What I anticipated with eager expectation, she found unremarkable and unappealing.

Spirituality can be like that, especially for pastors and other ministry professionals. It can be difficult to maintain a consistent, vibrant, growing relationship with God that impacts this world because things associated with God can become so familiar and so available that we no longer anticipate Him with eagerness. We can lose our appetite for spiritual things just like that baker lost her taste for spectacular pastries.

Over familiarity with God is not the kind of thing that happens quickly. It might take decades. But after more than forty years of reading the Bible, praying, attending church (of course pastors do this more than most), and even leading churches, I must admit to this reality: enjoying a vibrant, mature spirituality is not easy. Over time, familiarity with spiritual things can have a deadening effect on my spiritual senses if I am not consciously developing my walk with Christ. Superficiality is an ever-present danger for all Christians the longer we live.

Over one hundred years ago, famed theologian Benjamin B. Warfield addressed a group of seminarians and warned them of over-familiarity and superficiality in their spiritual lives. Here is an excerpt from what he said to those students:

"We are frequently told, indeed, that the great danger of the theological student lies precisely in his constant contact with divine things. They may come to seem common to him, because they are customary...The words which tell you of God's terrible majesty or of His glorious goodness may come to be mere words to you - Hebrew and Greek words, with etymologies, and inflections, and connections in sentences. The

reasonings which establish to you the mysteries of His saving activities may come to be to you mere logical paradigms, with premises and conclusions, fitly framed, no doubt, and triumphantly cogent, but with no further significance to you than their formal logical conclusiveness. God's stately stepping in His redemptive processes may become to you a mere series of facts of history...It is your great danger. But it is your great danger, only because it is your great privilege. Think of what your privilege is when your greatest danger is that the great things of religion may become common to you! Other men, oppressed by the hard conditions of life, sunk in the daily struggle for bread perhaps, distracted at any rate by the dreadful drag of the world upon them and the awful rush of the world's work, find it hard to get time and opportunity so much as to pause and consider whether there be such things as God, and religion, and salvation from the sin that compass-

es them about and holds them captive. The very atmosphere of your life is these things; you breathe them in at every pore; they surround you, encompass you, press in upon you from every side. It is all in danger of becoming common to you! God forgive you, you are in danger of becoming weary of God!

Do you know what this danger is? Or, rather, let us turn the question - are you alive to what your privileges are? Are you making full use of them? Are you, by this constant contact with divine things, growing in holiness, becoming every day more and more men of God? If not, you are hardening!"¹

Those are convicting words. But they express a truth that every pastor reading this article must carefully consider.

THE DANGER OF DECEPTION

There is another danger that pastors face besides over-familiarity with God. Pastors can sometimes deceive themselves into believing because we do all

LES LOFQUIST'S ITINERARY

January

- 19-22 BMW Board Meetings, Lawrenceville, GA
- 31 Faith Bible Church, White Cloud, MI

February

- 5 Calvary Bible College Board Meeting, Kansas City, MO
- 6-7 Church of the Open Door Bible Conference, Leavenworth, KS
- 8 Heart of America Regional, Leavenworth, KS
- 12 Smyrna (MI) Bible Church Valentine Banquet
- 18-20 UIM International, Glendale, AZ
- 21 Southeast Valley Bible Church, Gilbert, AZ
- 22 AZ Regional Pastors Luncheon, Phoenix, AZ
- 24 1st Fundamental Bible Church, Calexico, CA
- 25 Pastors' Conference, Mexicali, Mexico

March

- 13 Stillwater Community Church, Covington, OH
- 18-19 Southeast Church Extension, Newport, TN
- 20 Bethel Baptist Church, Parrottsville, TN
- 21 Appalachian Bible College Chapel, Mt Hope, WV

kinds of God-related activities, these activities in themselves must mean we must have a quality relationship with God. And many other people in the congregation assume this is true. The idea that pastors are closer to God because they do God-related activities is pretty common. These activities, when done well, seem to say to everyone (including me): "He must be spiritual. Look how good he is at preaching and teaching and serving in the church." But this can be self-deception.

Paul David Tripp warns: "One of the scarier components of remaining sin is its deceitfulness. It is a reality that is vital to acknowledge and confess. Sin blinds... Sin plays havoc with our spiritual vision. Although we are able to see the sin of others with specificity and clarity, we tend to be blind to our own."² We need to acknowledge our propensity toward self-deception and rigorously attack it by godly accountability through self-confrontation (when reading the Word and listening to it preached and taught). We must constantly see ourselves on the pages of Scripture, allowing the Word to cleanse us and the Holy Spirit to convict us. Then we need to repent whenever necessary. We also need wise and godly advisers who aren't afraid to help us identify our sins and failures and encroaching bad habits (yes, I have such an accountability partner myself).

Familiarity and self-deception are some dangers to keep in mind regarding the negatives involved with this issue. But what are some of the things we can do positively?

I've learned the most common theme with those pastors who've fallen is their universal admission they no longer had an intimate walk with Christ prior to their sin.

MEDITATE DAILY ON THE WORD

Over the years I have talked to several pastors who left the ministry following moral failure. I have also talked to others who've counseled former pastors who failed morally. I've learned the most common theme with those pastors

who've fallen is their universal admission they no longer had an intimate walk with Christ prior to their sin. They no longer read the Bible with hunger in their souls, instead reading the Bible became a lifeless, academic exercise to prepare sermons. Their passion for God grew cold. Their private prayer life dried up. Their devotional life was non-existent. Their souls shriveled up and the tragic results in their lives ultimately demonstrated it.

I've encountered other pastors who hadn't fallen, yet quietly expressed to me that their personal lives feel shallow, empty and powerless. They confided that their ministry does not seem to be a vibrant expression of the living God. The most humbling and wonderful experience for a spiritual leader is to minister knowing God is working through you. But the most frightening is to feel that you are on your own in ministry without God's good hand of blessing. Pastors need to be reminded that a commitment to a disciplined walk of holiness and intimacy with God leads to changed lives, beginning with the pastor's own life. The transformed life of the leader is a vital pre-requisite!³

If a pastor wants to make a difference in the world, it begins quietly. In the Word. In prayer. Alone. Regularly. Consistently. Until we are taken home to heaven.

Tripp says the same thing. "I am more and more convinced that what gives a ministry its motivations, perseverance, humility, joy, tenderness, passion, and grace is the devotional life of the one doing ministry. When I daily admit how needy I am, daily meditate on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and daily feed on the restorative wisdom of his Word, I am propelled to share with others the grace that I am daily receiving at the hands of my Savior. There simply is no set of exegetical, homiletical, or leadership skills that can compensate for the absence of this in the life of a pastor. It is my worship that enables me to lead others to worship."⁴

REFLECT WITH A SENSE OF AWE

The first step in regaining a sense of awe may be as simple as turning off your TV and stopping your media intake. I'm afraid too many pastors have suc-

cumbed to brain-numbing activities that plaster over their dry souls, spending hours upon hours every night indulging in Internet pop culture and Face Book emptiness (or worse). They are bored and their ministry shows it. And in their boredom, they have grown familiar with holy things.

After turning off your TV and Internet, how do you regain a sense of awe? I believe it starts with a brutal self-assessment, admitting the painful reality: "I no longer find myself with a holy sense of awe...I'm just going through the motions, filled with pride at my own ability to accomplish things at church." That must be followed up with confession and repentance, asking God to forgive your pride and carelessness and overly familiar attitude. And then you must get into the Word, praying as you open it: "Lord, forgive me! Please help me see your holy majesty and regain my sense of awe!" Then go back and re-read some of the passionate portions of Scripture.

Marvel at Abraham's agonized pleas for Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33), then see its terrifying judgment by the Lord God Almighty. Imagine hearing Moses sing with Miriam and all Israel on the far side of the Red Sea after the awesome deliverance from the Egyptian army: "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

Read aloud from Isaiah 40 and meditate on God's greatness and majesty. Think about Ezra tearing his clothes and hair in anguish at the sins of his people, challenging them to tremble at God's word (Ezra 9). Meditate on the familiar but profound cries of the Psalmist and pray they will become your own cries: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42: 1-2). "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1). "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).

Contemplate with sorrow and wonder the scenes of the Cross where our Savior suffered the terrible judgment for your

sins. Read those passages as if you were reading them for the first time. And then try to imagine His empty tomb on Easter Sunday! Stop and meditate on all those events of the Passion Week.

End by carefully reflecting on the scenes from the Book of Revelation in the throne room of God. Read about the righteous wrath of God poured out on sinful mankind and then celebrate the indescribable joys of the redeemed gathered for all eternity, worshipping the Lamb.

Read God's Word carefully and slowly and pray as you read that God will work in your own mind and soul. May God help us never to lose our holy reverence and sense of awe!

CONCLUSION

The pastor is not, nor should he be, exempt from the menial tasks of church administration and ministry. Those activities are an important part of being a pastor. But the only way for the pastor to accomplish ministry tasks without resentment and anxiety is to first take care of his own soul. If there is no time to nurture his own spiritual life, he will become a harassed, anxious, whining servant just like Martha of whom it was written: "Martha was distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40). Literally the Greek verb means Martha was "dragging around in a tumult," fussing about her preparations and service while her sister Mary sat listening to Christ. Imagine fussing about serving, while the Lord Jesus was right there in her home!

And if the pastor persists in that careless Martha-like attitude while serving, neglecting worshipping at the feet of Christ, the ultimate results will bring him sorrow, sadness and perhaps even scandal. What a high price to pay.

Pastors, pray for God to stir your heart once again. And then go out into this vile, sin-sick world as a man transformed by Christ but not conformed to this world. Passionate for God, compassionate with people, separated from sin, separated unto Him.

Seminary on October 4, 1911. Reprinted in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (Fall 1995), pages 181-195.

2. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), p. 34.
3. IFCA International Pastor Gary Taylor made this the subject of his doctoral dissertation, which he then published and entitled *Transformed Leadership* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2013). The thesis of his study is that when the church's leaders are transformed by Bible study, prayer, confession and other spiritual disciplines...the whole church benefits. It is a book worth reading.
4. Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, p. 35.

END NOTES

1. Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Religious Life of Theological Students," from an address delivered by Dr. Warfield at the Autumn Conference at Princeton Theological

Why A Pastor's Spiritual Life Matters



Matt Haste

Dr. Matthew Haste teaches at CIU and has previously served as College Ministry and Adult Discipleship Pastor in Kentucky.

Pastor, your spiritual health matters to your church. Your pursuit of Christ impacts your people. You know this, of course, but does your daily schedule reflect it? When you allocate time and energy toward the spiritual disciplines, do you do so with a view toward what is at stake? God's sovereign purposes are not dependent on your maturity, of course, but the New Testament often speaks of the significance of a pastor's spirituality to the health of his congregation. Consider the following seven reasons motivation for the pursuit of godliness and guides to praying for your own growth.

SEVEN MOTIVATIONS FOR PURSUING GOD:

1. God is holy and he will not be mocked.

Personal holiness is indispensable because you serve a holy God (1 Peter 4:14-16). But your growth in godliness must be rooted in faithfulness to Christ, not the pursuit of fruitful ministry. Your motivation has to rest on the character of God because no other incentive will be constant. Your people may not know if you falter in your private devotions, and you may not be a pastor forever. But he who called you into holiness will always be holy and he will not be mocked (Gal. 6:79).

2. Godliness is good for you.

The pursuit of godliness is not at odds with your hopes for happiness. In fact, as Paul reminded Timothy, godliness "holds promise for the present life" (1 Tim. 4:8). Pastors who are growing in their faith can take comfort in a clean conscience. You may not always know what to do in your ministry, but you can know with certainty how to do it—with Christ-like character. Moreover, godliness holds promise "also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Your regular efforts to discipline yourself are daily deposits into that moment when you hear your master declare, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

3. Your spirituality can inspire or impede the salvation of others.

The apostle Paul once told a young pastor to keep a close watch on his life and teaching because "by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul was not suggesting that a pastor's lifestyle alone will bring salvation to his congregation. Rather, he seemed to be pointing to the power of preaching the Word of God and living a life that makes it more believable. When others observe a life transformed by the gospel, they are inspired to consider the good news for themselves. Your life is not the means of salvation for anyone, but it can be used by God to point them in the right direction. Likewise, it can be a distraction from the truth you preach each week.

When others observe a life transformed by the gospel, they are inspired to consider the good news for themselves.

4. Your conduct impacts the effectiveness of your communication.

A brilliant sermon can be silenced by a lifestyle that contradicts it. As leaders, we must strive "to keep the commandment unstained" (1 Tim. 6:14), so that "the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2:5). You put hours into studying the text so that you can faithfully expound upon its meaning. Do not short-circuit your efforts by forsaking your own spirituality. Your prayer life is more important than your sermon prep. If you want to point your people faithfully to the power of the Word, start by persistently consuming it yourself.

5. Your people learn discipline from you as well as doctrine.

Paul's example with Timothy reminds us that the people we lead and serve will inherit more from us than simply our sermons (2 Tim.

3:10). In fact, God commands them to do so (Hebrews 13:7). As a pastor, you can help your people grow in spiritual maturity by living a life worthy of imitation. This kind of leadership cannot be accomplished as you breeze past the pews on your way to the pulpit each week. You have to know your people and they have to know you. You ought to be able to say to them, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Then you must live a life that will give you no regrets if they do.

6. Your enemy wants to destroy you.

Wise pastors know their enemy well, and they recognize their daily peril as preachers of God’s Word (1 Peter 5:8). The enemy would love to see your study of Scripture become a professional skill rather than a personal discipline. He will coax you toward using the text as ammunition against your congregation rather than applying it to your own heart. He will draw your attention to the specks of others while distracting you from the log in your own eye (Matt. 7:3-5). Pastors, “Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

7. A reckoning awaits.

Pastors are stewards of the mysteries of God (Col. 1:24-25) and will someday give an account for their work (Matt. 25:19, James 3:1). The prospect of this day ought to humble us to seek the Spirit anew every morning. As a pastor, you have not merely received a job to do but souls to guard (Heb.13:17). Therefore, pastors must pursue spiritual maturity for their own sake and for the sake of those entrusted to their care. “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Gal.6:9).

Whether you are a pastor or future pastor, there are critical things at stake in how you live your life.

This article originally appeared in The Southern Blog on September 25, 2015 and was entitled “7 crucial reasons why a pastor’s spiritual life matters to his church.” It is used here by permission.

How To Make An Effective Preacher

Author Unknown

Fling him into his office. Tear the “Office” sign from the door and nail on the sign, “Study.” Take him off the mailing list. Lock him up with his books and his typewriter and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts and broken hearts and the flock of lives of a superficial flock and a holy God.

Force him to be the one man in our surfeited communities who knows about God. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all the night through. And let him come out only when he’s bruised and beaten into being a blessing.

Shut his mouth forever spouting remarks, and stop his tongue forever tripping lightly over every nonessential. Require him to have something to say before he dares break the silence. Bend his knees in the lonesome valley.

Burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for God. And make him exchange his pious stance for a humble walk with God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God. Rip out his telephone. Burn up his ecclesiastical success sheets.

Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible and tie him to the pulpit. And make him preach the Word of the living God!

Test him. Quiz him. Examine him. Humiliate him for his ignorance of things divine. Shame him for his good comprehension of finances, batting averages, and political infighting. Laugh at his frustrated effort to play psychiatrist. Form a choir and raise a chant and haunt him with it night and day—“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

When at long last he dares assay the pulpit, ask him if he has a word from God. If he does not, then dismiss him. Tell him you can read the morning paper and digest the television commentaries, and think through the day’s superficial problems, and manage the community’s weary drives, and bless the sordid baked potatoes and green beans, *ad infinitum*, better than he can.

Command him not to come back until he’s read and reread, written and rewritten, until he can stand up, worn and forlorn, and say, “Thus saith the Lord.”

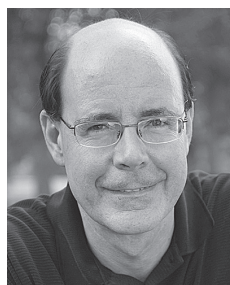
Break him across the board of his ill-gotten popularity. Smack him hard with his own prestige. Corner him with questions about God. Cover him with demands for celestial wisdom. And give him no escape until he’s back against the wall of the Word.

*Give him a Bible
and tie him to the pulpit.
And make him preach the
Word of the living God!*

And sit down before him and listen to the only word he has left—God’s Word. Let him be totally ignorant of the down-street gossip, but give him a chapter and order him to walk around it, camp on it, sup with it, and come at last to speak it backward and forward, until all he says about it rings with the truth of eternity.

And when he’s burned out by the flaming Word, when he’s consumed at last by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he’s privileged to translate the truth of God to man, finally transferred from earth to heaven, then bear him away gently and blow a muted trumpet and lay him down softly. Place a two-edged sword in his coffin, and raise the tomb triumphant. For he was a brave soldier of the Word. And ere he died, he had become a man of God.

A Word-Filled Life



John Barnett

Dr. John Barnett is the Senior Pastor at Calvary Bible Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, a Bible Conference speaker, tour group leader to Israel and an IFCA International member.

We are not our own. As a redeemed child of God we have a life to live that will end with a personal examination by the One we love, the One who bought us, and the only One who really matters - Jesus Christ our Lord. How we've used our time on Earth will one day be tested by fire, the fire of Christ's presence that will burn away everything we did which wasn't pleasing to Him.

How can we live in a way that truly pleases the Lord? Is it something we have to guess about or wonder whether we are doing what He desires?

The description of what lasts and pleases Him is in God's Word. To glorify Christ to the maximum by how we live takes choosing to stay in step with His plan. That plan, His Word, is intended by God to fill our lives. Hence, a Word filled life won't be burned up, which is the only way to not waste the life He has given each of us to use for His glory. If I could describe the best life possible - a life of peace, serenity, security, and joy - it would be the Word filled life!

God's Word contains clear guidelines for how to have an exciting lifetime filled with confidence, purpose, direction, and hope. The Scriptures instruct us on how to have a joyous Word filled marriage and the most harmonious and loving family possible, a Word filled family. And a Word filled work life can be the most satisfying, purposeful, and rewarding employment for an entire lifetime.

God wants to greatly bless us through the Word filled life and into senior citizenship. Then, as we face that appointment with Christ to show what we have done with our lives (2 Corinthians 5:10), we can enter His presence with joy, thrilled to be with the One who loved us, and whom we love supremely.

No matter who you are or where you are in life, your age or what your past might be, God has described His perfect plan for you in the Scriptures. The Lord of heaven and earth has much to say about the optimal operating range we should live within, and has instilled in each

of us every needed option to operate and fulfill His plans.

We find the details on how to do all those things in God's Word. If you want to live life the way God says it should be, the best life possible, live a Word filled life!

*The only way for us to have
the mind of Christ is to invite
His leadership into our lives by
becoming filled with His Word.*

WHAT WERE CHRIST'S FIRST WORDS IN MINISTRY?

In the New Testament, Christ's recorded words during His ministry on earth are highlighted in what we call a "red letter edition" Bible. To me, it is astounding to read these first words Jesus said after He was introduced publicly at His baptism: "It is written, 'Man shall not live [exist, continue, go on] by bread alone [eating our physical food], but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

In other words, Jesus was saying, "It is not enough just to eat and exist and have physical life. If you want to have a full and abundant life in your youth, marriage, family, work, and senior years, as I designed it to be, you must allow My every Word to fill your life!"

The only way for us to have the mind of Christ is to invite His leadership into our lives by becoming filled with His Word so His Spirit can use those words to sanctify (John 17:17), guide (Psalm 119:105), defend (Ephesians 6:17), encourage (Romans 15:4), and feed our spiritual lives (Matthew 4:4). In Colossians 3:16-17, Paul equates the necessity for filling our lives with God's Word with the filling of the Spirit. Compare Ephesians 5:18-20 with the Colossians 3 passage, the lists are identical, and lead to the conclusion that the fullness of the Spirit is equal to His Word filling our lives!

WHAT IS A WORD FILLED LIFE?

What is a Word filled life? Consider the following eight qualities.

A Word filled life is God's way of communicating with us.

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end" (Psalm 119:33).

You can't be sustained, nurtured and have life the way God intended unless it is a Word filled life. Every time you open God's Word, prayerfully ask Him: "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). This is like going online and downloading fresh, new, personal e-mail from God Himself. Have you heard from Him lately? You can, as often as you want. Just prayerfully open your heart before the Word of God and, like a wireless device, your soul will start getting both encouraging and challenging "download messages" from heaven.

A Word filled life is God's way of recharging our batteries.

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

We expend strength daily in the battle of "plain old life." We need spiritual power to go on, to receive direction, comfort, and all God wants for us in our spiritual lives. When we stop our busy lives to get in the Word, it quickens us, giving life and power through the Spirit of God.

Look at the beginning of John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life..." Perhaps you have been going through life in your own strength and failed to realize whatever you do in the flesh "profits nothing," even if you are teaching a Sunday school class or performing other ministries in the church. You may even be doing a personal Bible study without first connecting with God by praying, "I want Your Spirit to speak to me. Teach and lead me through this Book." If you don't connect with Him, however, and get charged spiritually, it all amounts to nothing because John 6:63 says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." Why go through life with a dead spiritual battery and miss the vital calls from the Lord?

Read the Word daily because it is an essential, life giving battery charger.

A Word filled life is God's way of giving us hope.

"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

When Paul wrote Romans (A.D. 55-58), only a handful of New Testament books had been written (perhaps James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and one of the Gospels). So "everything that was written in the past" primarily referred to the Old Testament. Have you ever read through the Old Testament? Did you pay attention to the type of people God used? Many had messed-up personal lives, family lives, public lives and spiritual lives, and everything-else lives.

The Word of God is the key that unlocks a Word filled life, a constantly hope-filled life, no matter what your situation. In one of my counseling sessions, after the person tearfully finished pouring out the tragic details of a sinful life, I said: "You know what? The Christian life is a series of new beginnings. Right now, you can start over - all fresh, cleansed, and brand new with the Christ who gives you hope!"

A Word filled life is God's way of cleaning us.

"He [will] sanctify and cleanse ... with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

Although the context of that verse is speaking of the various roles of the Spirit-filled life, and it is a husband sanctifying and cleansing his wife with the Word, the ultimate lesson is this: as you allow the Word to fill your life, it will constantly sanctify, bathe, and cleanse you. God wants this for every one of His children.

I used to work at a custom pool company where I ran a jackhammer. If you run one of those things very long, you shake and sweat, and get covered in crushed debris and dust. By the end of the day, the first thing I wanted to do was take a hot shower to get clean again. It is the same spiritually. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He reminded them we all get our feet dirty as we walk

through life.

As the day starts and after it ends are two great times to take showers and physically stay fresh and clean. So it also is with staying spiritually clean. Through the washing of water by God's Word, He thoroughly cleans us so we may freely come into His presence for joy-filled fellowship.

A Word filled life is God's way of giving us weapons for victory.

"[Take] the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:16-17).

The only offensive weapon we have in our spiritual life is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Is there something troubling you? Some old habit, old fear or old insecurity making you spiritually falter, that keeps you wanting to go on the offensive? A Word filled life provides you with the weapons for victory so you can "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

When you feel spiritually cold, "draw near to God" (James 4:8). And when old shackles enslave you, you can remember since "the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). God expects you to use His Word as an offensive weapon to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil as he attacks.

*A Word filled life is one
in which your spiritual
muscles get strengthened as
your soul receives daily
exercise in the Word.*

A Word filled life is God's way of teaching us discernment.

"Solid food belongs to those who are of full age...those who...have had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

You exercise spiritually by daily being in the Word of God. Your soul needs constant exercise to grow strong enough to discern between good and evil, what is pleasing to God and what is not, what is fruitful and what will be consumed at

the judgment seat of Christ.

When I was a boy, my mother, an antiques buff, used to take me to garage sales to help her discern between the real and the fake. She especially liked Sterling silver and pearls, but because her eyes were not good, and her teeth not her own, she needed my assistance. She taught me the markings (British, European, and American), so by reading the backs of the silverware I could easily spot Sterling. As for the pearls, Mom taught me to scrape them on my teeth to find the rough ones, the genuine pearls. Perhaps you can spot real silver and pearls because your senses have also been exercised, but have you exercised your soul yet? Can you discern immediately if the direction a conversation, relationship or business deal is heading is not good? A Word filled life is one in which your spiritual muscles get strengthened as your soul receives daily exercise in the Word.

A Word filled life is God's way of helping us feel secure in Christ.

"Lay aside all filthiness and ... wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to saved your souls" (James 1:21).

To "lay aside" is similar in meaning to putting aside our soiled clothes at the end of a hard, dirty day. Prior to receiving the Word, you should put aside any sin that will hamper you humbly coming to feast at the Lord's table of fellowship. He promises: "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Just as clean garments at the end of a filthy day feel so very refreshing so does keeping clean accounts with God. Regular confession and cleansing through the Word keeps our conscience clear so we can feel secure in our fellowship and peace with Christ.

The opposite is also true, however. Sins that are not forsaken grieve God's Spirit and make you feel distant, then detached, and finally feel insecure about salvation. Believers who sin act like unbelievers; believers who act like unbelievers soon feel lost and insecure.

A Word filled life is God's way of growing us so that we can taste God's goodness.

"As newborn babes, desire the pure

milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:2-3).

Craving for God's Word with the same intensity a baby craves milk is characteristic of a Word filled life. Without that craving, discernible spiritual growth is unlikely. If you do not have such a desire for the Scriptures, pray 1 Peter 2:2 back to the Lord and ask for a passion for His Word as you commit to the daily reading habit. Then rejoice as you taste of His goodness by getting to know Him intimately through His precious Word.

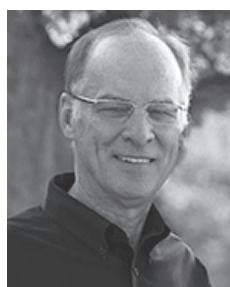
CONCLUSION

So, why live a Word filled life? It is God's perfect way of communicating, recharging your battery, giving hope, cleansing you, providing weapons of victory, teaching discernment, helping you feel secure in Christ so you can taste of God's goodness. All those benefits of a Word filled life can be distilled down into one verse: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

The Lord God of the Universe wants to lead you in His perfect path, to fill you with joyful fellowship and to keep you secure in His sovereign hand at work in your life. He also wants you to rejoice in the knowledge that He created you to accomplish some specific works for His glory. Look at Ephesians 2:10: "[You] are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that [you] should walk in them." Are you delighting in the fact you are Christ's workmanship, a beautiful work of art, designed for good works? And that He has placed you here on earth to accomplish something in particular for Him, something unique and wonderful? Such truth is at the heart of why you should long to live a Word filled life!

This article is excerpted from John Barnett's book *Discipline Yourself for Godliness* (Tulsa: Mullerhaus Publishing, 2007) and was originally a chapter entitled "A Word Filled Life Is the Only Way to Not Waste Your Life." *Discipline Yourself for Godliness* is available online at www.amazon.com.

Going Rogue



Paul Seger

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African elephants are the largest land animal on earth. They are majestic. At 12,000 pounds and ten feet tall, they can intimidate anyone and anything. Elephants don't worry much about predators.

The norm is to live in herds within a matriarchal social structure. The largest female leads the group of eight to one hundred elephants in a tight family unit. At the age of twelve to fifteen years the males leave the group and begin a new family. There is always a dominant male in the herd, but sooner or later, a younger male will take over, and the older ones are left to wander alone. It is a melancholy scene to watch a great-grandfather pachyderm grazing completely by himself.

For whatever reason, some of these older males go berserk; they go rogue. Unstable males become violent and territorial. They go on a rampage, attacking anyone in their way, destroying crops and vegetation. These are the really scary guys.

Unstable elephant males become violent and territorial. That describes some human leaders as well. We might immediately think of Adolf Hitler or Idi Amin. They are well known, but there are thousands of other leaders who have acted the same way. They just didn't have as big a platform on which to act out their rampage.

The irony is that rogues often get that way after some success. These are not normally young leaders. They are often at the stage of life where they have reached a level of success. They have built an empire, and their territorial nature leads them to think they own the place. They are difficult to work for. They may even become violent—at least in words.

Nothing is as dangerous as success. Few leaders can handle it. Something can be triggered inside when a leader has a positive track record. Going rogue results in a god-complex and leaders start acting it out. They are the boss. They bark commands and demand compliance. Their word is law. They must not be questioned. They

have established their kingdom, and all serfs must bow in reverence. They are unstable males who have become violent and territorial.

There seems to be a fork in the road as leaders age. It often happens in their 60s or 70s. They either become gracious or caustic. One road leads to a mellowing; the other leads to harshness. The path a leader takes is a choice, but it is not just one choice. It is a lifetime of choices that culminate in an accelerated downhill race to the finish. Tendencies of a lifetime become accentuated and exaggerated. Idiosyncrasies that are managed and suppressed in younger years may become unleashed in later life.

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Like the old rogue elephant, a rogue leader may end up wandering the savannah of life as a loner, kicked out of the herd. He may still be kicking up the dust and trumpeting, but everyone around him wants him out of the group.

There comes a time in every leadership role when the individual becomes a liability. He may have been a productive part of the herd, but there is a point at which he is no longer an asset. There is a time when his group participation ceases to be productive.

The trick is knowing when to step away before the herd kicks you out. Leaving the leadership role before things sour is an art form. There is no scientific formula for making a decision. Since I have not yet experienced this, I find it difficult to write on this topic. Perhaps this chapter should be another book a decade or two from now, but I have observed the rogue scenario enough to know I don't want to be one.

Christian leaders often brag that they will die with their boots on and that there is no such

thing as retirement in the Bible. But the reality is that most cannot keep their physical stamina and mental acuity right up to the end, especially if they live a long life. They may want to die with their boots on, but normally it is a good idea to take them off when they are in a hospital bed. There is no dishonor in stepping away from a leadership role before you must.

African leaders are renowned for staying too long. Their aspiration is president for life. The common saying on the continent is, “One man, one vote, one time.” Nelson Mandela was the exception. He stepped away for the presidency of South Africa long before he needed to. He was still mentally and physically doing very well, yet he was determined to set an example to the rest of the African leaders that they should not aspire to life-long positions.

Going rogue is not an isolated situation in the leadership world. The Bible is full of examples.

Moses successfully pulled off a major coup and ransomed a million people from bondage, performed multiple miracles, and personally talked with God. Yet he blew it late in life and failed to cross the Jordan and finish his task. Moses went rogue.

David penned poetry that resonates with people to this day and was considered a man after God’s own heart. Yet late in life he betrayed his marriage vows and then murdered Bathsheba’s husband. David went rogue.

Solomon was the smartest guy in the room . . . any room . . . any time . . . anywhere. Yet at the end of his life he turned against the very God who had granted all his wisdom and wealth. Solomon went rogue.

Uzziah reigned over Israel for fifty-two incredibly successful years. He was one of the most productive, godly, and famous kings. He won wars and fueled the economy of the nation to prosperity. Yet toward the end of his life he became proud and he self-destructed. Uzziah went rogue.

Noah pulled off one of the greatest feats of faith in human history and earned a place in the Hebrews hall of faith. Yet after all his success we find him in a drunken stupor. Noah went rogue.

Lot walked away from the decadence

and debauchery of one of the most corrupt cultures of his day, yet he ended his life in a drunken, incestuous relationship with his daughters. Lot went rogue.

Judas was one of The Twelve, one of the chosen few. This elite corps of men lived with Jesus, the creator God. He witnessed the miracles, went on mission trips, and was held in high esteem for his proximity to Christ. Yet those “successes” did not keep him from a notorious ending. Judas went rogue.

Demas was a co-worker with the famous Apostle Paul. He was part of the winning church-planting team. He saw the power of God in people’s lives and the success of a massive church-planting initiative. Demas went rogue.

I play golf. I didn’t say I am a golfer. I just play golf. The older I get, it seems I do better on the front nine than the back nine. Perhaps it is lack of stamina and focus. It is just getting harder to finish the last hole with the same concentration and strength as I had on the first hole. This may be a microcosm of life. It seems counterintuitive that failure would come later in life, yet the stories from the Bible that are listed in this chapter are all about men who failed during the “back nine.” I’ve noticed repeatedly that, in the ministry, more men fail later in life than earlier in life.

It is really difficult to finish well. One of the few leaders in the Bible to do so was the Apostle Paul. He was able to pen the following last words before the executioner arrived at his prison cell: The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Paul was exceptional. The tendency for leaders is to go rogue.

I’m not there yet (I don’t think), but I am concerned about this next phase of my life. In preparation I’ve been thinking about this subject and asking a lot of questions. So the following is merely theory. I haven’t put it to the test, but here is my strategy to keep from going rogue.

1. Be aware that this is possible. Merely the fact that this is on my radar must surely have some value. It is not going to catch me by surprise. Identify the tendencies in your life that, if they were exaggerated, would cause you to go rogue. I realize I have the potential

of going rogue. Just knowing that fact must surely be a good step in the right direction.

2. Guard my daily walk. It seems that leaders who go rogue did not just wake up one day a different person. It was a lifetime of habits and patterns that became accelerated and accentuated with age. I’m assuming the bad parts of me will only be worse with age. Now is the time to monitor my actions and attitudes. What I sow today will come to fruition later on.
3. Ask for accountability. Establish an exit strategy from your present leadership role. I have asked three people who know me well and see me regularly to let me know if they see I’m “losing it.” I’ve watched boards agonize over letting the CEO go because he no longer “has it.” It is awkward to tell someone that he is going rogue. Therefore, I have invited three people to approach me without any fear of reprisal. They know I’ll be greatly disappointed if they see me going rogue and don’t tell me.

“Unstable males become violent and territorial.” That accurately describes rogue elephants. I hope it never describes me.

This is an excerpt from Paul Seger’s book *Chief: Leadership Lessons from a Village in Africa* which is available for purchase at www.amazon.com

What Is A Toxic Leader?



Kenneth O. Gangel

The late Kenneth O. Gangel was Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Dallas Seminary and former Professor of Christian Education at Calvary Bible College, Kansas City, MO. Kenn also was a member of IFCA International. He entered heaven in 2009.

A vast percentage of leadership books in both the secular and religious domains deal with how to move from average to good or good to great in your own leadership, or how to help other people on your team do just that. The same analysis holds true in periodical literature, both journals and magazines. That's why Jean Lipman-Blumen's book hit the market with a crash in 2004. The title alone suggests, one could say, an "alluring" analysis of something we have swept into the corner and refused to look at: *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians—and How We Can Survive Them*.

Defective Christian leaders rarely get their pictures in Time or Newsweek for defrauding employees or driving their ministries into bankruptcy, but make no mistake about it, we have toxic leaders in our midst. Lipman-Blumen wonders why people follow such leaders and decides they do so because of a desire for dependence, a need to play a more crucial role in the organization, and just plain fear.

What allows abused leaders to survive, sometimes even thrive? There must be a "buffering sufferer" who takes the sting from the top and softens it for those below. Middle management leaders can protect their people and make it possible for them to effectively carry out their work undeterred by storms at the top.

But that stop-gap solution might not always work. We must understand the biblical and spiritual consequences of toxic leadership and attempt to at least cut the percentage of toxic leaders in the ranks of evangelical ministries. But first we have to begin with an understanding of the concept of toxic leadership. To be sure, toxic leaders are better described than defined, but toxicity is a clear term in the English language and I believe we can make the necessary crossover from the field of medicine to our understanding of leadership.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (3rd edition) defines it as fol-

lows. The adjective toxic means "of, relating to, or caused by a toxin or other poison...capable of causing injury or death." The word comes from the late Latin *toxicus* and from the Greek *toxikon*, both meaning poison. The noun toxicity simply means "the quality or condition of being toxic." The noun toxin describes "a poisonous substance, especially a protein, produced by living cells or organisms, capable of causing disease when introduced into the body tissues but often also capable of inducing neutralizing antibodies or antitoxins." We could go on, but you get the idea. Toxic often appears in connection with snake venom, alcohol, or fallout in the environment from the mishandling of heavy metals such as lead, or solvents such as carbon tetrachloride.

We must understand the biblical and spiritual consequences of toxic leadership and attempt to at least cut the percentage of toxic leaders in the ranks of evangelical ministries.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TOXIC LEADER

I have already mentioned a few of these above in my brief allusion to the work of Lipman-Blumen but the list of characteristics seems almost longer than we can treat. Furthermore, the complex blend of these personality traits in toxic leaders renders it impossible to pinpoint the exact problem through which the leader injects poison into the organization. The best we can do is acknowledge the presence of a toxic leader, then make an attempt to deal with it in whatever way possible to us at the time. So let me list ten qualities commonly found in toxic leaders in one or more blends, and then deal with each one separately in its own chapter. By the way, I intend no severity growing or declining throughout this list. These are separate entities, each one no less or no more dangerous to ministry than the others.

The Deceptive Leader

For this character trait we need no long sessions of debate or discussion; Scripture provides the perfect example in the third patriarch, Jacob. Surprised? The very fact that some readers thought I would start listing people like Hitler, Mussolini, Mao TseTung, or Saddam Hussein indicates already that we have the wrong concept of toxicity. A person with toxins in his or her body does not necessarily feel those toxins nor know their origin. If you have just been bitten by a Copperhead and you can clearly identify the snake to medical authorities, there is no guessing involved. But if you just go home night after night with a migraine headache and no physical cause can be found, you might be working for a toxic leader and, sometimes, the toxicity might be deception.

The Autocratic Leader

Leaders given to total control of an organization, micro-managers, dictators, operate that way largely because they have an overly-developed ambition, or perhaps an inappropriate or inordinate ambition. This might be the most common kind of toxic leader in Christian organizations because they can hide behind the authority of ordination, office, or even a particular interpretation of Scripture. They warn you and other members of the staff not to “touch the Lord’s anointed” lest God bring some destructive horror into your life.

The Egotistic Leader

Those familiar with the literature on leadership studies know that virtually every expert indicates leaders must have some touch of ego in order to take the point position and hold it through sun and storm. But let’s not confuse pride of workmanship with flat out arrogance.

The Incompetent Leader

People in a subordinate relationship find it most difficult to harbor the nagging thought that the boss might not know as much about their jobs as they do. I’ve spent a good part of my life working with students who graduated and enter assistant or associate positions in churches and other organizations. In some cases they walk into ideal learning situations in which a veteran pastor

full of wisdom can help them through the rocky early years. In others however, they sign on with a church cursed by a leadership vacuum in which there exists a “Judges-like atmosphere,” people doing that which seems right in their own eyes.

The Ignorant Leader

A fine line exists between incompetence and ignorance. An incompetent leader simply does not know what to do. The ignorant leader simply does not know anything about leadership. He might be a walking encyclopedia in other areas, but incapable of understanding a specific arena of leadership. That explains why many faculty cannot function as administrators.

The Cruel Leader

As indicated earlier, our minds immediately dance to this tune when we think about a word as nasty as toxicity in relation to Christian leaders. But thousands of people have seen cruel leaders in operation and still suffer the effects. I never fell into the curse of working for a cruel leader, but I did live with a cruel father during the earliest years of my life, so I have some personal sense of this disease.

The Evil Leader

Some leaders simply lack integrity and authenticity regardless of their titles. Have we not seen world renowned pastors and television evangelists fall into adultery or theft with some regularity over the last several decades? Furthermore, evil leaders frequently come by their positions circuitously or even violently so their followers operate in fear right from the beginning. We’ll have to take a close look at this one.

The Demanding Leader

Almost all autocrats or cruel leaders are demanding, but not every demanding leader practices either cruel or autocratic leadership. In this chapter we will focus on the so-called “perfectionists” who cannot stand errors in their own lives and ministries and therefore will not tolerate them in others. To be sure, one can more easily work with this person than some of the others, but the toxicity that emanates from such an

environment destroys the team spirit we all want to develop in our organizations. Teams thrive on shared commitment. Without it, people perform as individuals; with it, they become a powerful unit of collective performance.

In every effective team, the members genuinely agree to become accountable with and to their teammates. The dynamic that keeps arising here notes that a working group depends on the performance of individuals, but an effective team is always worth more than the sum of its parts. Leaders who foster team development in the right place at the right time prime their organizations for top performance. As Katzenbach and Smith once wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*, “The difference between teams that perform and other groups that don’t is a subject to which most of us pay far too little attention”.¹

The Reckless Leader

I’m tempted to say here that one can spot reckless leaders most clearly by laziness, but we know of many other forms of recklessness. We all find it difficult to serve lazy leaders if we are aggressive and eager to get the job done. But recklessness or carelessness can introduce toxicity to any organization. Titus learned this first hand about two thousand years ago and we can profit from his experience.

WHY WOULD PEOPLE WORK FOR A TOXIC LEADER?

With the stench of the Enron disaster still in our nostrils, we have become accustomed to the ongoing lawsuits from employees who lost everything. Let’s remember that most of the people who left Enron didn’t drop out or voluntarily go to other businesses. They actually loved their jobs and felt they functioned at the center of action in such a gigantic corporation. But clearly toxic leadership ruled at Enron, so why did people stay?

Belief in the Unbelievable

The old wisdom says when something looks too good to be true it probably is. Stock portfolios, retirement packages, working conditions—everything seemed right and most of Enron’s people felt they were functioning in one

of the greatest companies ever built. That's why pastors are less likely to leave a large church than a small one. However, a large organization affords part of the draw for an autocratic toxic leader who needs full command until someone blows the whistle.

Following the Illusion

Leaders too smart to believe in the unbelievable might fail to analyze the descriptions and analyses that toxic leaders communicate to their people. Toxic leaders may not be as harmless as doves, but they are often as smart as serpents. They create illusions of achievement and great hope for the future "If you just stick with me." We are, after all, an idol-worshipping people who glorify their heroes and heap riches upon them; why wouldn't we follow a leader in charge of some great business or ministry?

Desire for Dependence

Some may recognize Lipman-Blumen's words. When asked why people follow or work for a toxic leader, she talks first about the myth of independence which still permeates a country that lost its independence to bureaucracy some time during the 20th century. The colonial patriots whose iron will and willingness to die for what they believed has given way to a shabby antinomian society willing to put up with the worst kind of immorality as long as they themselves are protected, fed and cared for.

Fear

Again, I refer to one of Lipman-Blumen's answers when asked why people would work for a toxic leader. In one interview she refers to Harold Geneen of IT&T where employees were so frightened of the boss they became physically ill and couldn't sleep for nights before they needed to report to him. Toxic leaders do not dispel such fear, they encourage it.

No Other Options

Sometimes we simply cannot find a way out. That applies to people in ministry as well as people in business organizations. A single mom without a college degree may be required to hold on to her secretarial job even though the

boss behaves like a monster.

HOW TOXIC LEADERS CREATE TOXIC ORGANIZATIONS

Leading the parade to poor performance we usually find ineffective decision-making. I've often told doctoral students in leadership classes that an analysis of decision-making has become my primary way to analyze an organization, company or ministry. A team-centered ministry will immediately display genuine group decision-making as opposed to advisory groups who say what they wish and then leave the decision to a single leader. This remains one of the most misunderstood aspects of effective leadership.

We also recognize a toxic organization by its high levels of dissatisfaction and stress. These result from destructive human relations not unlike the relationships we see in dysfunctional families. People get discouraged, good people leave the organization, but somehow, things just don't seem to improve. So we can specify that toxic organizations are:

- Helpless in making things better
- Not supportive emotionally or professionally
- Unable to identify the causes of the discomfort and pain
- Unable to leave the situation permanently and unable to solve problems permanently
- Consistently under attack ²

A toxic organization does not fulfill its mission and it has virtually no capacity to handle serious problem-solving. Its whole climate militates against the kind of relationships essential for handling problems—poor communication, bad decision-making, and manipulative, self-centered leaders.

Bacal gets even more specific. The toxic organization is most often a relatively small work unit where there is considerable face-to-face interaction among the work unit members. This is because inter-personal relationships stand at the core of the sick organization. If there is a low level of interaction, it is likely that a toxic organization will emerge.³

At the top of this pyramid are managers who tend to be cold and distant,

sometimes deliberately so. Toxic managers avoid people and situations that may require explanation of their decisions or behavior. Whether or not she knows why she behaves as she does, the toxic manager confuses subordinates, thereby reducing the trust level and increasing the fear of punishment or failure.

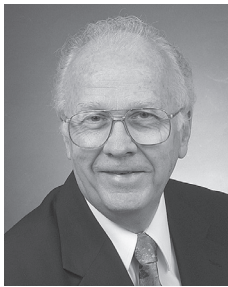
Dan Chenoweth talks about the possibility of turning the situation around. One positive result of such a process is that the entire organization is impacted when anyone in a leadership role becomes humble and open to core changes. If you are the person that spotted the bully behavior and took action toward intervention, you may feel an incredible personal sense of reward. You may see yourself as a key player in the evolution of the human spirit of your company, and in its advancement toward a more sustainable 'human' culture that truly values learning, cooperation, and collaboration. Handing leadership development 'crutches' to a 'broken' leader can be the greatest gift you could ever give to that individual—and to your entire organization.⁴

This article is excerpted from *Surviving Toxic Leaders* and originally appeared in Mar/Apr 2008 VOICE.

ENDNOTES:

1. Katzenbach, Jon and Douglas K. Smith, 162.
2. Bacal, "Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace," 2
3. Bacal, "Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace,"
4. Chenoweth, "Five Characteristics That Differentiate Great Leaders from Toxic Leaders"

Islam: Comparisons, Contrasts, Contradictions



Fred Plastow

Fred Plastow is an IFCA International member. He had 30 years field experience among Muslims with Avant Ministries (formerly Gospel Missionary Union). During the past years he has presented a seminar series on Understanding Islam in many churches with good response. He can be contacted at fplastow@comcast.net.

Most critical issues of life are theological as they define our relationship with God. Current events have thrust upon the world the issue of faith. As many are aware, the media continues to present us with a mythical diet telling us that Islam is a peaceful religion. In the nine-week period following 9/11, the New York Times carried sixty-four news items on Islam, all of them positive. Appreciation of Islam has actually increased in the U.S. since the World Trade Towers were demolished. Much of this is due to media misinformation.

Islam does not mean “peace,” but rather “submission.” A reading of the Quran indicates that Islam means submission to God and his prophet. “...if any contend against Allah and His apostle Allah is strict in punishment...” (Q8.13, 14). This has tremendous political consequences for Islam and the world, as Islam is not simply a religion to minister to man’s inner spiritual needs, but has political ramifications with a worldwide goal. Islam’s goal is that *Shariah* law will dominate humanity.

Hasan Al-Banna (one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood), stated one of the principles of The Muslim Brotherhood as, “I believe that the Muslim has the responsibility to work to revive the glory of Islam, in promoting the revival of its peoples, in restoring its legislation. I believe that the banner of Islam should dominate humanity, and that the task of each Muslim consists of educating the world according to the rules of Islam; I commit myself to fight as long as I live to fulfill this mission, and to sacrifice all I possess to it.” This view is foundational to radical Islam today.

RELIGION AND THE POSTMODERN MINDSET

Another myth that contributes to this evaluation of a peaceful Islam is the postmodern secular view of religion which reasons something like this: “Religion teaches that which is good. Islam is a religion, so it must be good. All religions are equal. Therefore Islam is to be given status

with all other religions.” While this sounds culturally sensitive, it is void of discernment and historical perspective. Islamic goals are not simply religious. They are theopolitical and envision Islam and Allah’s law dominating the world.

*Islam’s goal is
that Shariah law will
dominate humanity.*

MONOTHEISM

While Islam is a monotheistic religion it holds to the “unicity” of God rather than the unity of God. It holds a strict absolute monotheism that will not tolerate the teaching of the Trinity. While Islam may appear unified, we find a cleavage between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims that began with the selection of the fourth Caliph (or successor) in Islam. Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, was chosen because of his ties with Muhammad through marriage. His sons, Hassan and Hussein, were considered descendants of the prophet and were to be followed. Hussein was killed at Karbala by the Sunnis and a division was created in Islam. In their pursuit to follow the succession of the prophet, the Shiites have developed a sort of saint-worship or adoration of Hussein and other holy men of Islam. The Sunnis and the strict Wahhabi sect see this as polytheism and numerous have been the conflicts between them. Thus while both Islam and Christianity are considered monotheistic religions, there is a vast contrasting difference in understanding.

TESTIMONY

The Muslim’s shahada or witness is: “There is no god, but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah.” There should be no doubt that while the Muslim testifies to one god, he joins this in his mind with his belief that Muhammad is the apostle of God. There is not one without

the other. Muhammad is the one who received the revelation of the eternal word of Allah, through Gabriel to himself. This word includes laws for the Muslim community by which they are bound. Laws then become the basis for life and politics. Consequently, Islam is theopolitical, and the goal of Islam is for the world to be governed by Islamic law or *Shariah*, which is Allah's law.

Christianity, however, sees a spiritual kingdom that is being constituted from peoples around the world who have been redeemed and are members of the body of Christ, and events of today are preparing for the physical / political kingdom to be revealed at the return of Christ. The laws of Jesus are not imposed on society. They are lived out in the lives of the believers among a hostile and unbelieving world. The Christian parallel to the Muslim's *shahada* or witness is: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3). Our faith is not based on a statement about the absolute oneness of God, but upon the knowledge of Him as revealed in His Son through the Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

The two books of each faith must also be contrasted: the linear Bible and the punctuated Quran. The Bible is an integrated historical unity revealed over a 1500 year period and recorded by over forty writers. The Quran, however, is purported to have been revealed in a twenty-two year period and is considered the final revelation, which supersedes all others. The Quran is referential concerning the Bible. That is, it summarizes the Old Testament biblical stories, but quotes none of them accurately. This may be one reason why the Jews of Mecca in the Seventh century rejected Muhammad. He didn't quote the references.

The New Testament, in contrast, quotes abundantly from the Old Testament in attestation to the fulfillment of prophecy. We carry the Old Testament and New Testament together in one book and see no contradiction. One could not, however, add the Quran to these two covenant books without creating a vast discontinuity. While

the Bible sustains its internal unity, the Quran accuses the Jews of corruption of their scriptures. This is a serious charge which Muslims today interpret as textual tampering and not just verbal twisting. This also leads to one of the most contradictory doctrines of Islam, that of *naskh wa'l mansukh*, ("abrogating and abrogated"). There are contradicting verses in the Quran that are explained as one verse abrogating, or setting aside, an earlier verse. Problems arise when an abrogating verse precedes an abrogated one. Since the Quran is structured by chapter length rather than chronologically, it is difficult to pinpoint the historical sequence. One thing is clear. There are Quranic verses that are viewed as abrogated yet they still constitute part of the text considered as eternal in the heavens. The Christian, who holds to an authoritative biblical text, finds this untenable.

HERMENEUTICS

In seeking to interpret the Bible we take the historical grammatical approach. This is so we won't misappropriate commands given to someone in the historical past and seek to apply them as normative to our life today. We instead look for life guiding principles. We take a grammatical approach so that we pay attention to the integrity of the text.

For the Muslim, his Quran is conceived as written on tablets in heaven from all eternity and so is applicable to life today. The men who flew into the World Trade Center left a note with the following: "...God said: 'Smite above their necks and smite all their finger tips.' (VIII-12) And know that the Gardens of Paradise are beautified with the best of ornaments, and its inhabitants are calling you. And...do not let differences come between you, and listen and obey, and if you kill, then kill completely, because this is the way of the Chosen One (i.e. the prophet)." While some Muslims may interpret this verse in a historical context of the past, these men saw it as applicable to today. The interpretative concept of an eternal word from God that must be practiced to the letter, apart from history, can have grave consequences.

COMMUNITY

While the Bible emphasizes the truth of the body of Christ, Islam speaks of

the Muslim Ummah ("community of believers"). Islam began in AD 622 when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina. It may seem strange to us that such an event was selected as the beginning of a religion. But it makes sense to the Muslim who sees the beginning of Islam as the time when the Muslims were constituted as a community and initiated social, religious and government laws. The Muslim community must come under the Islamic *Shariah* or law. Thus the Muslim community is bound together by faith, religion, law and politics.

In contrast to Islam, the body of Christ is a spiritual organism comprised of those from all nations who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and await His coming in the air. The body of Christ was formed at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Since the Muslim perceives the Ummah as worldwide, any action against any Muslim anywhere is perceived as a threat to the worldwide community. One problem that has beset the Muslim world is that the succession to the prophet was never adequately established and so history has not produced a model Islamic state.

LAW OR SHARIAH

To the Christian the law is our school teacher to bring us to Christ for deliverance from a standard we could not keep in our own power. For the Jew, the keeping of the law meant salvation. For the Muslim the law is the revealed will of God that must be obeyed. The Muslim believes that the Muslim community must be guided by the *Shariah* or Islamic law. The *Shariah* derives its sources from the Quran, the Hadith or traditional sayings and doings of the Islamic prophet, as well as judicial precedents. Since Islam is theopolitical in its perception of the world, everywhere Islam is established, its community must be guided by Islamic law. As the influence of Islam grows in the U.S., appeals are being made by the Muslim community to be judged by *Shariah* law rather than our American secularly established laws. For the Muslim, the state is only viable if it governs according to *Shariah*.

CHRIST

The Quran mentions Jesus in ninety three verses scattered over fifteen

chapters. He is called the Son of Mary, and the Word of God. The Quran attests that He did miracles, raised the dead, and is coming again. However, the Quran denies the deity of Christ, His Sonship, and His crucifixion. The Quran affirms that Jesus was made like Adam. Thus while Islam has a certain picture of Jesus, it has a distorted and incomplete one. In consequence, when a Christian seeks to testify to the glories of Christ and His person, he is met with resistance by the Muslim who believes he has a fuller revelation. This presents us with quite a few challenges.

SALVATION

I believe that one of the most important things that distinguish biblical Christianity from all other religions of the world is the assurance of forgiveness of sin and salvation from eternal judgment. This is not arrogance. It is simple faith in the integrity of our God who has said that “he who has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12).

According to the Bible, salvation is based upon faith alone in Christ alone, apart from self-fulfillment of the law or through good works. Christ alone purchased our redemption, which we in no way deserved. Salvation is provided by the grace of God. The Muslim, on the other hand, through his attachment to a system of law and works, can never be assured of forgiveness and salvation. He can never know if he has done everything or done enough. The only hope of salvation indicated in the Quran is through martyrdom, fighting in the cause of Allah.

Islam, in its zeal to do God’s will by effort, has missed the greatest truth for all mankind: the sacrifice of Christ which gives us the assurance of sins forgiven and eternal life.

Water Baptism in a Middle East Context

Hanna Shahin

Hanna Shahin was raised in the old city of Jerusalem and began his fulltime Christian ministry in international Christian radio in July of 1971. He has served in every country of the Middle East and North Africa. Of his 44 years of ministry, Hanna spent 26 of those in international Christian broadcasting, a large part of which he headed up the Arabic Ministry of Trans World Radio. In 2005, he and his wife, Evelyn, founded Endure International, a church planting ministry. He has authored two books: My Enemy... My Brother and The Master Disciple-Maker.

The church has had diverse and divergent views on the issue of baptism. What does it signify? What value does it have? When should it be administered? Is the sprinkling of water or immersion the Biblical example? What happens if a child or an adult is never baptized? These are some of the innumerable questions that do not have one answer but quite a few answers each, depending where one looks and who you ask.

This short article does not attempt to give answers to the broad questions surrounding baptism. Rather it is concerned with baptism in a Middle East context. In that specific context, we Christians may have missed the point completely. As a matter of fact, we have a documented case in one country where two followers of Christ, not having access to a body of water to be baptized, ended up baptizing each other using sand! Incredible, but true. By what stretch of the imagination can anyone expect and accept that to be Biblical baptism?

Baptism to a believing Middle Eastern is first and foremost about identification: identification with Christ and with the church. If circumcision is the sign of identification for a Jew and with Judaism, baptism is the sign of identification for a Christian and with Christianity. To someone from a non-Christian background, such an act represents a complete withdrawal from and denial of one's religious background and traditional faith. An individual committing such an act is considered to be an apostate in his family, society and culture. The consequences can be brutal, and in some cases fatal.

To many among us, baptism is not that important and never was since Christianity is all about faith. Quoting Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians we confirm that "By grace you are saved through faith." Missionaries to the Middle East did not teach their audiences and followers otherwise, at least not Evangelical missionaries. So how is it that Middle Eastern believers place such an importance on baptism? Perhaps they missed the point. Or may be we did.

Middle Eastern followers of Christ have in their heart placed their faith in Christ. Just like us. But this concept is exactly where the challenge is. Faith in one's heart is hidden and surely unseen. Nobody can see faith. Why not keep it that way? For one thing it would be a lot safer for them.

*So how is it that
Middle Eastern believers
place such an importance
on baptism?*

As many in the Middle East see it, having faith in one's heart and keeping it there is just not enough. Paul says that much in Romans 10:9 where he writes: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." James dedicates much of his epistle to deal with that issue at length.

To a Middle Eastern follower of Christ, what faith did on the inside, his or her baptism did on the outside. Baptism is when the person in the Middle East is publicly identified as a follower of Christ, it's the very public signal of their faith.

So, baptism in the Middle East is much more than a ritual. A believer's life can literally hang on whether he or she is baptized or not. This is why I asked whether we may have missed the point altogether of baptism.

For many people in the West, baptism usually does not go much beyond speaking a personal testimony before the church. It is often times used as a prerequisite to join that local church. However, when a brother or a sister from a Middle Eastern background is baptized, and because of the weight of such a step, baptism does not stop at being a testimony of their inward faith presented at the time of their baptism. Baptism becomes their testimony every day. It is ever present before them and before

others. Not that they will be baptized again and again, but their baptism will shadow them everywhere they go in their world. Their baptism becomes the testimony of their lives day in, day out. Baptism is the outward expression of their faith which will always mark them. In a Middle Eastern context, it is by baptism that a person will be identified as having become a follower of Christ.

Regretfully, for many among us in the West, this perspective is absent. Baptism is an event. We rarely refer to it. And if we do, we refer to it as an event in our history. But baptism is not our everyday testimony. Nobody points the finger at us saying, "this is one of the baptized." Some of us may even be called a Baptist. But baptism has not marked our lives nearly the same way baptism marks the life of a Middle Eastern follower of Christ - not only once, but every day, and for the rest of their life.

I know that at the time of my baptism, I was asked about what I believed. The person performing the baptism asked me questions to check my understanding of the Scriptures. I was expected to verbalize my faith that, yes, Christ died for my sins, and that, yes, I had accepted him as my Savior and Lord.

I have since attended scores of baptisms, including those of our sons. And in every case it has been the same scenario. Either all the questions come from the same book, or those who ask the questions have all graduated from the same seminary. It all revolves around making sure of the person's good Biblical faith.

But it is interesting to note in the Gypsy communities of Europe where Christ has been proclaimed and accepted, baptism is not exactly the ritual we have become used to. After an individual from that community accepts the Lord, there is normally a waiting period of at least six months before that person is allowed to be baptized, and even then he or she has to prove that their life has changed. This is where the church leader or pastor goes around in that person's community and asks the neighbors about the changes that have occurred. Has that person stopped beating his wife? Has he stopped drinking or stealing or whatever else has marked him in that community? It is only after enough testimonies are received reporting that a

real change has happened and has been noted in the community that such a person would be baptized.

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Is there something for us to learn here? Is baptism really about having the correct biblical understanding, about asking the right questions and hearing the right answers? Is it not more about how our faith affects us daily and in what areas our following of Christ translates into our everyday life? Here again, it seems we may have missed the point completely.

CONFESSION OF FAITH IN A MIDDLE EASTERN CONTEXT

This discussion leads me to broach another issue that is directly related. In many ways it stems from the discussion on baptism. This is regarding the public confession of faith.

The faith of a Middle Eastern follower of Christ is what he did on the inside, his baptism is what he did on the outside. That is not to be taken to mean there is a redemptive value to the act of baptism. What I mean is based on the verse in Paul's epistle to the Roman church where he says: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Given the fact that our faith is unseen, some if not many among us, have had their faith challenged by others. But we do not feel the pressure to do anything much about that. We do not see the need to make it public. Faith saves. Not the public exposition or expression of it. Faith alone in Christ alone and His payment for sin on the Cross gives us eternal security. Not the testimony of our lives. And so we are content with faith. There is no need for anything else. But, as we will see, this is not necessarily the case with Middle Eastern followers of Christ.

Though these brothers and sisters

have also experienced saving faith in Christ, true confirmation of that faith is validated only when their faith becomes public knowledge, realizing the price they may have to pay to do that.

It is one thing for such a follower of Christ to believe. It is another to publicly confess this belief. The issue ceases to be about their individual faith. It ceases to be about what went on in their hearts. It is as if this is only validated, even in their own hearts and minds, when they tell others about it. In most cases, baptism is the first step in that direction.

It is worth noting that the apostle Paul in Romans 10:9 puts confession with the mouth before the believing in the heart. It can be easily argued that such an order does not necessarily mean that an individual can be saved simply by confessing the Lordship of Jesus with his mouth. Such an outspoken confession indicates that something has happened on the inside. Words can only express convictions. They represent convictions. But they cannot make them.

Yet by the same token, it can be argued that by placing the two conditions in the order he did, Paul was sending a clear message to those that received his letter and to us. The Romans could not content themselves with simply believing in their hearts... their faith had to be translated into a public confession.

Such a confession in a Middle Eastern context is almost never cheap and it was not cheap in the days of Paul. If anybody knew that, it was Paul himself. Paul knew firsthand from both sides of that divide. First as someone who exacted a heavy price from those who did make their confession public. Then as someone from whom a heavy price was exacted. Therefore, he knew well what such words would mean to his readers.

Having said all of that, it is quite probable that many young Middle Eastern men and women who ask to be baptized do not fully understand all that is involved in making such a decision. But after being baptized, they do.

There are two things that imperatively fall on us when it comes to baptizing followers of Christ from such a background. First, we only baptize adults, not children, unless those children have parents who themselves are

followers of Christ.

Secondly, we very openly and honestly alert and prepare those wishing to be baptized to the real risks involved in such a step. This is not a question about having qualms to follow what is definitely the teaching of our Lord in Scripture. It is rather about taking responsibility for what we can bring upon others as we lead them to such acts of obedience.

The above should not take away from the sense of personal faith, boldness and risk that each of those who are baptized has when they ask (and often plead) to be baptized, which is the case more often than not. And those among us who were and are involved in performing baptisms usually wait weeks and months and hesitate before we embark on such duties knowing its gravity. But waiting or hesitating too long can have devastating results in the lives of those who ask to be baptized.

CONCLUSION

I have to admit that we cannot pass over these issues lightly. I know we in the Middle Eastern context cannot draw people into a vital relationship with Jesus, knowing fully well what that could entail for them, and then simply withdraw. The same is true when it comes to leading them to acts of obedience or identification. The responsibility is as much with us as it is with them.

The commission that was laid upon us by our Lord does not disengage us from our responsibilities. For though we may be willing to take up that commission seriously regardless of the cost to us, yet that does not exempt us from our responsibilities towards those to whom we reach out.

Tribute to Tremendous Teachers



Mark Steiner

Mark Steiner is Founder & President of DiscipleLand in Fort Collins, Colorado. Visit www.discipleland.com where IFCA members are entitled to discounts. Or call 800.284.0158.

When you read the words “tremendous teacher” does a familiar face come into sharp focus? What man or woman so impacted your life that your reality was eternally altered? Here’s how one man marked me for life.

I was one of ten students seated around an oval conference table waiting for our esteemed professor to enter the room. We were complaining that this class, Principles of Discipleship, met at such an unreasonably early hour. Precisely at 6:00 a.m., Dr. Howard Hendricks walked into the room and announced, “Discipleship principle number one: ‘you’ve got to count the cost.’”

Those memorable classroom experiences opened my eyes to how Jesus made disciples in the first century, and how that process impacts His Church today. As the course drew to a close, Prof Hendricks gave us one final assignment: “When I visit your places of ministry,” he explained, “I’ll ask you only one thing: show me your disciples.” We left that room stunned and silent...but inspired.

Months later, while in the trenches of a local church ministry, I began to work closely with children. They were receptive. They were eager. They were capable. But their spiritual growth was marginal. These children were not being challenged. They were not reaching their peak potential, and it was not their fault!

Luke 2:52 offers a rare glimpse into Jesus’ childhood: “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and men.” Joseph and Mary made sure that their Son’s activities were kept in balance. He grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. Balanced discipleship interweaves three dimensions: growth in knowledge + character + conduct. When we examine the lives of dynamic disciples throughout history, we consistently find those same three components:

Knowledge: Growing disciples KNOW God intimately. They develop a reservoir of knowledge based on a Biblical worldview. The vast

majority of today’s Christian kids are spiritually malnourished. Ensure that your children receive thorough training in the faith. Don’t entrust this important task to chance. (See Proverbs 2:4-11.)

Those memorable classroom experiences opened my eyes to how Jesus made disciples in the first century, and how that process impacts His Church today.

Character: Growing disciples LOVE God passionately. They display Christlike character in every area of life. “Character” describes who you really are, the person you choose to be. Endeavor to be a consistent role model of Jesus’ life, convictions, and values. Your children build character through thousands of choices, one decision at a time. (See Mark 12:30-31.)

Conduct: Growing disciples SERVE God selflessly. They demonstrate faithful conduct that honors God and helps people. Encourage your children to implement Biblical principles in practical ways every day. Demonstrate the faith through acts of service, compassion, generosity, and sacrifice. The truth of God’s Word must move from each child’s head, to the heart, and then to the hands and feet. (See Mark 10:42-45.)

ACTION STEP

The Bible illumines a limited number of “must know” topics to understand (knowledge), “must be” traits to exhibit (character), and “must do” activities to experience (conduct). When a child’s development includes those topics, traits, and experiences, you can be reasonably assured that you have done your part to build a balanced, lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ. Strive to become the “tremendous teacher” that someone else remembers with great affection and admiration!

Humble Pie



Cathy Harvey

Cathy Harvey is a mom of three and grandmother of five. She has been married for 38 years to Stephen Harvey, her best friend from college. She works as the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Shepherd's College, a college for students with intellectual disabilities, in Union Grove, Wisconsin.

Rushing through the house to leave for work, my mind was multi-tasking to the hilt, spurred on by my irritation with everyone who didn't pick up after themselves. The little foxes were eating the vine and fueling my mood, minute-by-rushed-minute. Pride stepped in, comparing and gloating on how organized I was. I whisked through the house in a last ditch effort to leave on time, snatching and tying up a bag of garbage.

I was also energized by my latest art project: Thanksgiving cards I was giddy about sending. Another wedge of pride slipped in, puffing myself up due to the fine details of my design, graced with a spiritual message (of course). I had spent evenings crafting all the pieces and decided to use my lunch hour that day to glue them together. I scooped up the pieces and supplies, stuffed them into a craft storage bag, grabbed my purse, lunch, the trash bag and scrambled out the door.

Without turning on the light, I rushed through the garage, pushed up the lid of the trashcan and tossed in the garbage. On my way to work I daydreamed about the anticipated noon hour. With prideful thoughts bursting like pus out of infected wound, my mind carried on unaware that "pride cometh before a fall."

Itching for my lunch break, I scooted out at 11:00. Grabbing my lunch, I looked for my craft storage bag, but didn't see it. I ran outside to check the car, but it wasn't there. Hurrying back to the office I looked again. I sat down and ran an Instant Replay in my mind: my hands were full, the garage was dark, I tossed in the garbage...oh nooo! With a sinking feeling I realized that I had also let go of my craft storage bag when I tossed the trash, and it was trash day in our neighborhood!

I immediately called home, but it was too late. Of course it was. In the split second of realizing what had happened I was convicted by the Holy Spirit. It was crystal clear. "So you think you're better than everyone? So organized

and puffed up over yourself and your creative gift which I have given you. I'll show you what I can do. I will let you throw out your craft with your own hand."

Smitten with conviction, embarrassment, shame and repentance, I could hardly focus on my job. All that work and time, so hard to come by, thrown away..."by my own hand!"

*In the split second
of realizing what had
happened I was convicted
by the Holy Spirit. It was
crystal clear.*

But God is a God of forgiveness. I felt His loving correction, swift and just. He spoke the truth in love to my heart. So, I began to create the pieces again, but with a new, humbled attitude.

A few days later I received an email from a friend who was giving up her stamping craft. Would I like to come over and see if there were any supplies I could use? Stepping into her house, I saw supplies of everything imaginable for crafting cards. She handed me a box and told me to fill it up! For every item I had tossed, God replaced it many times over! He had forgiven me, and like Job, restored many times over what had been lost.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Fellowship News



The Indiana Regional met at Heritage Bible Church of Remington, IN with Gary Gilley speaking.



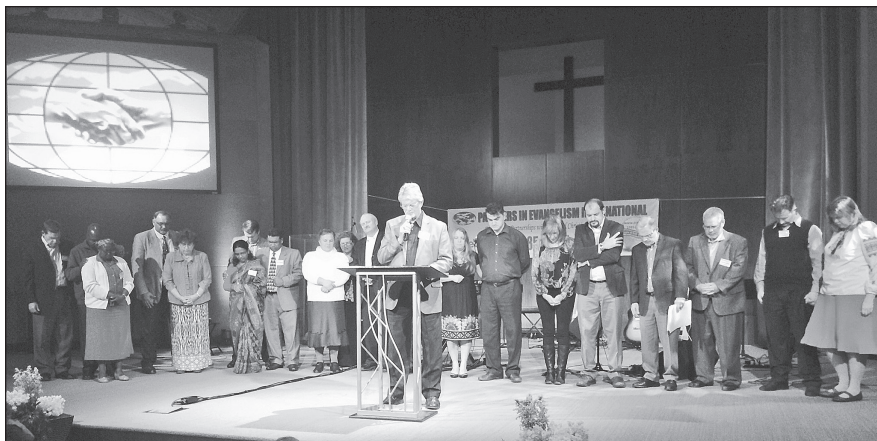
Stephen Davey will be one of the General Session speakers for the 2016 IFCA Annual Convention. He is pictured here at the Shepherds 360 National Conference held at his church in Cary, NC with retired IFCA Army Chaplain Alex Brown (L) and Les Lofquist (R).



Three Regionals met at Cedine Bible Camp in Spring City, TN which included Atlantic Southeast, Cumberland and Gulf States Regionals. Speakers were Dr. Bruce McAllister, Dir. Of Pastor Relations at BJU, and Dr. Les Lofquist.

IFCA churches have generously supported the Ukrainian Crisis Evangelism fund at Slavic Gospel Association in order to reach war refugees. Here is Yaroslav Machinsky from Revival Church of Kiev presenting a plaque to Les Lofquist in gratitude for all that IFCA churches have given towards refugees.





Partners in Evangelism International is an IFCA member mission supporting national workers in 13 countries. They celebrated their 30th Anniversary in Chicago and had nationals from all across the world present their ministries. Pictured are some of those national workers.

Present at the PIEI 30th Anniversary Banquet were (L to R): Pastor Richard Wahl, River Grove (IL) Bible Church; Andy Girwauth, Association of Bible Churches, Guyana, South America; Les Lofquist; Pastor Vishal Debicharran of Crabwood Creek Bible Church in Guyana.



We Welcome these Men to our Fellowship



Dr. Jeremy J Estrema
Colorado Springs, CO

Dr. Paul M Henebury
Redwood Valley, CA

Rev. Keith D Rickert
Lowell, IN

Mr. Fred E Wagner
Wellington, CO

Volunteer Archaeologists Needed

Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) is searching for Joshua's Ai and invites you to join them as a volunteer archaeological digger. ABR is an organization dedicated to the authority of Scripture and endeavors to demonstrate the Bible's authority to a skeptical world.

The location of Joshua's Ai has been a matter of mystery and controversy since the beginnings of archaeological research in Israel. Many scholars have concluded that the location of Joshua's Ai is at et-Tell. They have used this conclusion to discredit the Biblical account of Joshua 7-8 because there is no evidence of occupation at et-Tell during the time of Joshua. ABR believes they have collected enough geographic, historical and archaeological evidence to demonstrate that Khirbet el-Maqatir is the Ai of Joshua.

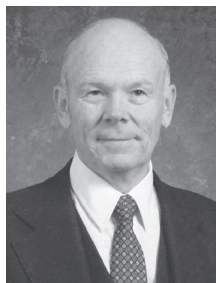
Due to the exciting results from this site, ABR has opened dig seasons to volunteers, including a three-week dig starting May 22. Khibret El-Maqatir is located north of Jerusalem along the security highway in Israel.

Come join ABR at Khibret El-Maqatir May 22-June 11, 2016 and help uncover evidences of the Biblical narrative. For more information visit ABR's website at www.biblearchaeology.org. Volunteer diggers may join ABR for any interval of time during the three weeks. At least one week participation is preferred, but not required. Costs and details are available at the ABR website.

You may also contact Shepherd's Theological Seminary (of Cary, NC) student Nathaniel Jackson who volunteered at Khibret El-Maqatir in the Summer of 2014. He is training as a square supervisor and will be happy to give you more details: archaeologyjack@gmail.com



Death of His Saints



Leslie P. Madison

Dr. Leslie P. Madison, aged 88, went to heaven on Tuesday, October 13, 2015 to join his parents, his wife Florence and many more of his family and friends.

Leslie Purl Madison was born in Fort Pierre, SD on August 14, 1927 to Walter Madison and Marguerite (McFarling) Madison. His grandfather had originally settled the homestead which ultimately grew to 13,000 acres. Ranching was a large part of Leslie's life. He trusted Christ as his Savior when he was nine years old having been taken to Byron Bible Camp by his uncle Rev. Don McFarling. When he was a teenager, while his father was grooming him to take over the ranch, Leslie committed himself to follow Christ no matter where it would lead him. It wasn't until Leslie went away to Bible School that his father Walter came to Christ as Savior.

As a teen Uncle Don introduced Leslie to several Christian nurses who considered his home a home-away-from-home. One of those nurses was Florence Ross who became Leslie's wife on December 21, 1945. Together Leslie and Florence moved to Chicago where Leslie attended Moody Bible Institute. During those years, Leslie became associated with Dr. William McCarrell of Cicero Bible Church. Following graduation from MBI in 1950, they moved to Colorado where Leslie worked as a missionary under John Mattingly and started Kendrick Bible Church near Rush.

During an IFCA Regional meeting, Leslie was challenged by Dr. John Walvoord to get further education and

so Leslie received his Bachelor's degree from Rockmont College then his Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1960 and his Th.D. from DTS in 1963. After finishing his doctoral work, he became the first pastor of Northwest Bible Church in Fort Worth. In 1974 he was called to be the President of Calvary Bible College in Kansas City, MO and served in that role until 1991.

Leslie joined IFCA in 1950 and served several different terms on the National Executive Committee. He also served as President of IFCA from 1984-87.



He retired to Hot Springs, SD and lived there until 2002 when he moved to Texas to be near his two daughters and grandchildren. After 57 years of marriage Florence preceded him in death on July 17, 2002. He later married Sally Wingard on February 1, 2003. He had two daughters, seven grandchildren and twenty two great-grandchildren.

His memorial service was held at Northwest Bible Church in Fort Worth with Dr. James Clark, President of Calvary Bible College & Seminary, officiating. He was buried in Hot Springs, SD.

Dr. Leslie Madison had a long, faithful and fruitful life serving God.

An Open Door



Joe O'Neill

Joe O'Neill is pastor of Mt. Hope Bible Church of Grass Lake, MI. He is a long-time member of IFCA International.

While he was in prison, the apostle Paul asked prayer for an “open door.” Paul told the Colossian believers to be vigilant prayer warriors and then asked them specifically to be “praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word” (Colossians 4:3).

As ministers of the gospel, our desire is to have “open doors” to get God’s Word out to as many people as possible. God has placed within us the same yearning that dwelt within the apostle Paul because we have the same Spirit.

One “open door” opportunity to share Christ is the local nursing home. Of all the people in the United States who are 65 years old or more, 5% live in nursing home facilities. That is more than one and a half million souls! Within a 30 minute drive of where I live there are 34 nursing home facilities. Many of these people are no longer physically able to drive and many of them don’t have family members willing to drive them to a church or a Bible study. And many of them are lost and without Christ. These people present to us an “open door,” but we must go to them.

Why is nursing home ministry so important?

The nursing home is usually the last stop before eternity. Those who enter, other than for quick rehab, don’t go home (many must sell their home to pay for their care). So, this is the last opportunity to reach them with the Gospel.

At a nursing home, there is some openness to spiritual matters. By the time a person goes into a nursing home, they have been humbled by their infirmities. Most are physically weak, many are beginning to lose some ability to remember clearly, and all have come to the point where they cannot fully care for themselves. This state often brings some humility. These circumstances of life may be used of the Lord to help them see their great need for the Savior.

There are many lonely people. Most of those in the nursing home don’t get regular visits. There are a few who have devoted family members who will come regularly to see them. But

many are lonely and we can ease their loneliness; we can encourage them, pray with them, share stories with them, read to them and sing with them. Remember the words of Jesus, “I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:36).

How can you get started in a nursing home ministry?

1. Respond to the invitations. Nursing home activities directors will often call churches to find men who will hold church services. I have had two nursing homes ask me to come at whatever day and whatever time I could hold a service for them. And though there are many other forms of ministry within a local church, can we pass by an “open door” where we are being invited to come? Could invitations like these be for us a little like the man in the Macedonian vision who asked for help (Acts 16:8-9)?

2. Ask if you can serve. Years ago, one of our elderly saints went into a nursing home and after visiting her several times, I found that no Protestant service was being held for the residents. I volunteered and have enjoyed several years of ministry (and both Protestants and Catholics come). The saint from our church has long since passed on to glory, but the work of the Lord is still going on.

Have you prayed for God to open a door of ministry for you, where the Gospel can be proclaimed? Perhaps He has a great opportunity for you right nearby at the local nursing home!

This article originally appeared in the September, 2015 edition of IFCA News, our electronic newsletter which is mailed out monthly.

2016 IFCA International Annual Convention Information, June 27 – July 1, 2016

LOCATION

Crowne Plaza Springfield
3000 South Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62703

HOTEL

The Crowne Plaza Springfield is prepared to meet all the room needs of individuals and families attending the 2016 IFCA Adult Convention. Each of their guest rooms is appointed with amenities for your comfort and convenience. Every room features a hair dryer, iron & ironing board, in room coffee maker, internet access and voice mail. Additional amenities include an indoor pool, sauna, whirlpool, outdoor sun deck on the 14th floor, and fitness center with state-of-the-art equipment.

The room rate is \$99.00 single or double per night plus tax. This group rate will be available Wednesday, June 21, 2016 through Sunday, July 3, 2016 based on availability. The hotel is holding a block of rooms for our convention through, June 1, 2016. After that cut-off date, the hotel will release the unreserved rooms for general sales. Plan to make reservations early to avoid the higher rates or the room block being full. Check-in time is 4:00 pm and check-out time is 11:00 am. Phone 1-877-834-3613 to make reservations, request the IFCA group rate using the group code "E1P" or IFCA International Group Block.

CANCELLATION POLICY

Canceling your reservation before 6:00 PM (local hotel time) on Tuesday, June 21, 2016 will result in no charge. Canceling your reservation after 6:00 PM (local hotel time) on June 21, 2016, or failing to show, will result in a charge of 1 night per room to your credit card. Taxes may apply. Failing to call or show before check-out time after the first night of a reservation will result in cancellation of the remainder of your reservation.

MEALS (Purchased via the IFCA Registration Form)

The package includes four dinners and one lunch inclusive. The Meal Plan begins with dinner on Monday, June 27, and ends with dinner, on Thursday, July 30, 2016. The one lunch will be on Tuesday, June 28, 2016. No breakfast provided. Pricing: Weekly Meal Ticket is adults \$105.00 and children ages 3 - 12, \$70.00. Children under 3 may eat off their parent's plate for free.

CHILD CARE

More information on this will be provided in the next issue of VOICE.

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Gracia Burnham will be our guest speaker at our Women's 2016 Conference. She will be speaking on Tuesday, June 28 in the morning and afternoon.

TRANSPORTATION

The Crowne Plaza Springfield provides complimentary shuttle service to and from the Springfield airport. Call the hotel by using the courtesy phone at the airport.

PARKING

Complimentary on-site parking

POLICY ON FACILITY USE

Use of facilities does not imply endorsement of the doctrines or associations of an organization.

2016 IFCA International Annual Convention Registration

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Springfield, IL

June 27 – July 1, 2016

Send form and your payment in full to IFCA, PO Box 810, Grandville, MI 49468-0810

Name _____
(LAST) (FIRST) (TITLE)

Name _____
(LAST) (FIRST) (TITLE)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Email Address _____

___ Please check if this is your first IFCA Convention that you have attended.

Child Registration Infant-age 12

Name _____ Age _____ Name _____ Age _____

Name _____ Age _____ Name _____ Age _____

(Children 13 and older should attend the IFCA Youth Convention or pay the adult registration fee.)

REGISTRATION & MEALS

Adult Registration Fees

Weekly Registration (5 days)

Number of Adults _____ x \$75 \$ _____

(after June 1 –\$90)

OR

Daily Registration (per day per adult)

Number of Adults _____ x \$26 \$ _____

Child Registration

Infant - age 12

(to help with child care costs) _____ x \$35 \$ _____

(after June 1 –\$45)

Weekly Meal Ticket

Number of Adults _____ x \$105 \$ _____

Children (ages 3-12) _____ x \$70 \$ _____

Total Amount Due \$ _____

IMPORTANT NOTE *You must contact the hotel to make your room reservations for the convention.
This form is for IFCA Convention Registration and Meals only. Thank you.*