

Summer
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A Journal for Church of God Ministries

engage

IN THIS ISSUE

When Truth Fades

Are We Making Believers or Disciples?

Hiring and Maintaining a Church Staff

Beyond Burnout

What Our Storms Teach Us

SUMMER 2015

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Issues for Your Inbox

SINCE ITS LAUNCH in 2009, *Engage* has been a resource for pastors, church staff, and general ministry leaders. The articles are intended to be informative and appealing to this demographic and are submitted by authors who are both solicited and not solicited.

Engage is an outgrowth of the former *Covenant Resources* magazine, which had the same basic purpose. Prior to that, it was *PROFILES*, a packet of flyers and newsletters from departments and ministries that were gathered and mailed in bulk every quarter.

While there have been several metamorphoses over the years, the intent of this publication has been the same: *Church of God leaders desiring to offer meaningful resources*. This is more difficult in this day and age because of the massive amount of material available on the Internet. Because of this instantaneous availability, the printing industry has suffered greatly.

Engage strives to strike a balance by offering an “issue” that is delivered to your inbox, rather than simply emailing

a random list of potentially helpful websites. Yes, *Engage* is no longer printed, but hopefully the presentation of this digital publication on a preset schedule fulfills a fundamental longing of the *arrival* of a publication.

Look for your next “issue” in September! ■

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

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by JERALD DAFFE

WHEN TRUTH FADES

THE TELEPHONE CONVERSATION (short form) went something like this: “Dr. Daffe, I have this opportunity to be a part-time youth pastor in a nearby church. My wife and I believe God wants us to take the ministry opportunity and help this youth group. But, there is a problem—the pastor isn’t known to be a truthful man.”

My response was very simple. “You are an ethical young man. It is important for you to do God’s will as He is revealing it. But, be assured this will be a short period of ministry there.”

It was three months, to be exact. The senior pastor asked the young minister to lie

to a group within the congregation to cover his own actions.

Unbelievable? Well, maybe.

The reality is that many men and even some women in ministry are guilty of allowing truth to fade. Blinded by the temptations of pride, materialism, relativism, advancement, and acceptance, to name a few, biblical standards for ethical speech and actions are shoved to the background. Regretfully, many individuals in ministry do not recognize having crossed the line due to a lack of strong ethical examples from colleagues and mentors.

For centuries, the Christian church has been plagued by *simony*, “the buying of

church offices,” and *nepotism*, “showing favoritism to family members in appointing to ministry positions regardless of their qualifications.” Then, add the sins of lying, theft, and immorality. It produces a morass of religious activity in the pulpit and the pew, but minimal spirituality.

A challenge for all believers, especially those called to vocational ministry, is one of not being intolerant of sins in other’s lives and being tolerant of them in their own lives! It’s hypocritical to preach and teach the need to be biblically truthful and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in daily life and then not be an example of it in both one’s private and public lives.

More than likely all of us know ministers who have brought shame on themselves, their families, local congregations, and the kingdom of God as a result of sinful actions. We wonder how they could have succumbed to such major temptations. One suggestion is their having cracks in their spiritual and ethical armor which were never repaired earlier in their lives.

Consider some of those “cracks” which contribute to the fading of truth.

Lying seems to be a good starting point, since there are so many examples/forms of it.

Exaggeration is frequently offered by some as “evangelistically speaking.” “Our attendance is nearing the 300 mark.” Realistically, it is a little over 200. Rounding up numbers in mathematics doesn’t allow that liberty!

Inflating statistical reports by estimating instead of exact number counts fits here. A

pastor friend took a new congregation. The Sunday school secretary asked this question: “Should we add 50 to the attendance to make up for latecomers like our last pastor did?” In response to his saying “no,” she said, “But it will look like our Sunday school is going down!”

In the same category is the failure to update (cull) membership rolls. One wonders how many deceased saints, backslidden individuals, and disconnected attenders are still listed but will no longer be part of the church community.

These examples remind us of the many times when political leaders have been caught in deceptive wording or outright misrepresentation. So a new word has been coined and frequently used—“misspoke.” If Karl Menninger were writing his classic book, *Whatever Became of Sin*, this would be another example of how sin simply has been renamed.

Another form of deception (lying) is placing one’s name on a book or article, which he or she has not written, but just gave some ideas or concepts to be included. An unnamed “ghost writer” then does the actual composition without any credit being given. Oh, yes, they are paid for their services. But, it doesn’t change who the actual author is. There is a great deal of difference between saying “I built this house” and “I had this house built within my specifications.”

Consider another example which deserves consideration under the heading of lying. It’s when an individual buys an academic degree from an unaccredited diploma

mill and then flaunts the letters behind his name. This form of deception fits into wanting to be someone you aren't, or claiming something for which you didn't work.

One other area for consideration is speech. Using inappropriate language is often excused as "pardon my French" or "excuse my salty language." Also fitting in the category is the use of derogatory language toward staff and church members. A well-known television minister berated his staff by stating, "A group of monkeys could do a better job than you have!"

Then there is the fading of truth through the various forms of theft. More than likely we know too many accounts of ministers being guilty of fraud and misuse of church funds. However, there are other examples of theft which are not only practiced more widely but also often unrealized. Consider plagiarism—taking what another person has written or spoken and presenting it as your own. All those sermon books can become a ready source for this. Then there is the practice of copying books, DVDs, and musical scores to avoid having to purchase multiple copies. As a result, the publishing companies are cheated out of their profits and the authors lose royalties for their work.

Another form of theft which causes the truth to fade is avidly pursuing members of other churches to build your own (sheep stealing). There seems to be both direct and indirect methods employed to bring believers to a new fold. As a result, many smaller churches that are the spiritual hope of their communities are decimated and eventually

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decline to the point of closure. What about non-reporting of undocumented income when filing your income tax? It is convenient to forget Christ's example and words emphasizing the fulfillment of our obligations to the government. However, it doesn't negate the spiritual and legal responsibilities.

The exodus from the church of the 18- to 35-year-olds can be attributed partially to this hypocrisy which they perceive in the church, especially among the ministerial leadership. Instead of living in a counter-cultural manner, exhibiting a distinct pattern consistent with the example and teachings of Christ, there appears to be a frequent melting into the contemporary pluralistic lifestyle.

This fading of truth impacts all ages of believers in the church, as well as causing unbelievers to question what the church and its leadership have to offer. If believers are going to be a light in a darkened world, they must reject any action or attitude which is not in accord with biblical doctrine and ethical practice.

It is at this point when true character is put to the test. Will the brilliance of truth remain a guiding light or will it be dimmed into disaster? ■

CHURCH OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS ISRAEL INITIATIVE

There are numerous opportunities to participate in the Israel Initiative, no matter the size of your congregation. Focusing on the five Cs (Children, Care, Construction, Communication, and Connections), the Israel Initiative takes the gospel back to the land where Jesus lived and ministered.

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2. Visit www.cogwm.org/IsraelGive, enter the three-digit ID, then complete your payment information.

Jerusalem Ministries

Mount of Olives Ministry and Training Center

		ID
Foundation & Structure Enhancement	\$100,000 (10 churches @ \$10,000 each)	010
Student Room & Apartment Renovation	\$100,000 (10 churches @ \$10,000 per room)	011
Chapel Renovation	\$80,000 (8 churches @ \$10,000 each)	012
Media Equipment	\$40,000 (100 individuals @ \$400)	013
Total Project Projection	\$300,000	

Center for Israeli Ministry (CIMS)

		ID
Missionary & Discipleship Training (Preparation for on-site ministry in Israel)	\$100,000 (50 individuals @ \$2,000 each)	014

Media Broadcast Special "Love for the People"

		ID
Media Special	\$100,000 (1,000 individuals @ \$100 each)	015

Community Ministries

		ID
Benevolence	\$30,000 (30 churches @ 1,000 each)	007
Kids Camp	\$30,000 (200 individuals @ \$150 each)	008
Community Missions	\$5,000 (200 individuals @ \$25 each)	009
Total Project Projection	\$65,000	

About Children's Center

		ID
Property Purchase	\$300,000	003
Land Development	\$100,000 (10 churches @ \$10,000 each)	016
Development of New Community Outreach Center	\$500,000 (50 churches @ \$10,000 each)	017
Playground Development/Equipment	\$25,000 (25 @ \$1,000 each)	018
Child Sponsorships	\$36,000 (200 individuals @ \$180 per year)	006
Backpack & Shoe Outreach	\$5,000 (200 individuals @ \$25 each)	019
Total Project Projection	\$966,000	

Bethlehem Christian School (400 students)

		ID
Curriculum	\$ 60,000 (24 churches @ \$2,500 each)	020
Total Project Projection	\$60,000	

Funds will be applied to projects as they become available



by ADAM BROWER

K A I O

KNOWLEDGE – AWARENESS – INTENTIONALITY – OBEDIENCE

PART II: THE BASIC WALKTHROUGH

I THINK WE ALL see the same thing when we look at the Christian landscape in America today. We see our hopes thrown into events instead of discipleship, programs instead of relationships, and numerical growth above spiritual health. I am not against the former, but I am against them if it is at the cost of the latter.

Currently, we appear to be living a type of Christianity where the individual person is prized above the corporate body. Another ongoing problem is that the label of “Christian” is one of the only things one can claim without supplying any verifiable evidence to back up one’s statement. If a person states that he or she is an athlete, the kind of evidence that would support this claim would have to be verifiable; such

as, being a member of a team and having a certain degree of physical ability. Combined, this external evidence points to not only what the person does, but also who the individual is as well. If a person says that he or she is a lawyer, this means the person practices law.

Sadly, it seems as though anyone can claim to be a Christian without supplying any tangible evidence of a qualifying lifestyle. The hallmark of a Christian life is that old things pass away and all things become new (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). If Paul is telling the truth to the Corinthians, then the reader would have to assume that such a transformation would transcend every area of life—change in passions, interests, thought processes, and outward living.

One of the most troubling problems, however, is placing any form of expectation or responsibility upon the shoulders of the believer, because many consider it too legalistic. There are some, unfortunately, who view such practice as being bound once again to the law. But we are not addressing a righteousness or justification that is the result of works. Instead, true conversion and love for God produces a zeal for good works, because they are the result of being made new and having a love for God that did not exist before being born again.

The truth is, we don't really know the person on our left or on our right in the seats we occupy on Sunday morning. We know they attend church, but we don't know if they serve the living God. Anyone can say he is a Christian, but not everyone meets the criteria for being a disciple with evidence. We must move past our apathy and cowardice that hides behind a fear of legalism. We need new ways of doing church together that tackle these issues head-on. Thanks to God, we believe that we have found one.

The word *kaio* in Greek means "to burn." It is also an acronym (KAIO) that stands for "**K**nowledge, **A**wareness, **I**ntention, and **O**bedience." KAIO is a small group ministry that is unlike the current small group models. It is unique because it requires the individual to have a relationship with God. It encourages the individual to pursue the good works God has predestined for them to accomplish (see Ephesians 2:10). This model spurs people to become what they

were meant to be—people who encourage others, and hold each other accountable to a growing relationship with the Lord that produces fruit.

The small group is designed to reflect the truth contained in Hebrews 10:24: "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (NKJV). How are we going to agitate, stir up, or provoke each other? This is not only the role of the Holy Spirit, but it is also the role believers must play in one another's lives. We can sit on our hands for our entire Christian walk if we so choose. God will never light a fire under us; that is not His role. He gets no glory out of a son who has to be made to do His will.

While we may be among the most educated people of our time, with information always at our fingertips, it is not the answer for our hurting world. The accumulation of knowledge without application can only produce one thing: we are becoming educated but not acting in love or obedience. If obedience to the Lord were as easy as hitting a button, then we would all push it every day. Without doubt, the majority of Christians are sincere, love God, and are more than willing to be obedient.

If knowledge and a willingness to obey are not the issue, then awareness and intention must be the missing link to seeing God move again in this nation. We can know Scripture and even want to serve God with all our hearts, but without an ongoing plan and strategy of keeping that pursuit in front of our eyes, we will most likely run out of gas on our own. Look at it this way: few people

are militant enough to get where they are going on their own, but most people will not hold anyone back or discourage someone from living to their fullest. That is why we need to be open with what God is calling us to, what we need to grow in, and what habits we need to change in our lives to become the individuals God is calling us to be. As we live openly in front of one another, we find ourselves living to a higher standard because we don't want to give anyone else a reason why they can't be more like Christ. It's like running a race with a team. You don't want to be the person who quits, starting a chain reaction, and giving others an excuse to not finish the race.

So how is KAIO structured?

Imagine a group of 6–12 people who come together once a week for 12 weeks twice a year. The leader announces the vision: “We are here to spur one another toward love and good deeds. We are not here to teach, preach, counsel each other, or socialize. We are here to share, learn, encourage, and hold one another accountable.” The groups then break up into accountability partners, and each partner asks the other the following six questions:

1. Were you obedient to what you felt God was asking you to do last week?
2. If yes, “How did it go?”
3. Do you have any shortcomings to confess, including right things you knew to do but didn't?
4. How is God asking you to obey Him this week?
5. Is it biblical?

6. Did you follow through with the good habits that you set forth to accomplish?

The group reassembles and shares three things together:

1. All participants are reading 12 verses at a time on a weekly basis, studying them, praying over them, hearing what God is saying through them, and then personally applying them.
2. They share testimony from their week that glorifies God.
3. They share encouraging words with each other that were received through praying for individuals in the group.

The group concludes, and everyone leaves knowing that they have the following assignments:

1. Call their KAIO buddy once during the week to extend encouragement.
2. Apply obedience to what they told their KAIO buddy they were going to do.
3. Continue in obedience to the habits they set for themselves.
4. Pray for group members.
5. Read the Scripture assignment for the week, study it, pray over it, and apply it!

KAIO has partnered with *Enliven* to bring the fullest experience possible to the believer. It is imperative that as we hear what God is saying, we understand what God has said, and what He is still saying in His Scriptures. The *Enliven Bible Study* series is designed to help people encounter God in His Word with a “hands-on” approach to studying

the Bible. *Enliven* is an exciting and effective method of studying God's Word that is completely dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord (Matt. 28:19-20). The *Enliven* student studies the Scriptures inductively, thereby drawing the student into a deeper understanding of the Bible. Each Bible study in the series is highly devotional in nature and dedicated to the spiritual formation of the believer. Students are called upon to discover what the Bible says, discern what the Scripture means, and obey and be transformed to be more like Christ and serve Christ fully. The student will personally experience the text and encounter the Holy Spirit in the Word of God. The primary goal of the *Enliven* study is to help students grow spiritually as they discover God's Word for themselves.

Imagine walking out of a small group meeting after hearing all of those testimonies, hearing what God is speaking through each other, being encouraged, and encouraging others. It is an amazing thing when Christians spur one another on! I hope this does more than intrigue you. We are looking for test groups to take on the KAIO/*Enliven* model this fall of 2015. If you are interested in training your people with KAIO/*Enliven*, we want to work with you to help you lead your people to where they were intended to be in genuine Christian community.

You can contact Pastor Adam Bower at preacherb4@yahoo.com ■

Adam Bower is pastor of the Praise Community Church of God in York, PA.

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Are We Making BELIEVERS or DISCIPLES?

by DEBI ROAM

WE ARE GLAD when people come to our church. Yet, the real question is not whether they are coming, but are they *changing*? Make no mistake, if we are *counting* them, we are *accountable* to disciple them. The church was never intended to be just a birthing center; the church has always existed to help people grow.

Jesus' instructions were clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe

all things that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20 NKJV). Notice that Jesus doesn't say "believers," but rather he uses the term, "disciples." Believers do not impress Jesus much, and they didn't impress James much either; so much so that he declared, "Even the demons believe that—and shudder (James 2:19 NIV 2011)." Jesus is looking for disciples—people who are willing to take up their cross, give up their old ways, and follow him (see Matt. 16:24). In order to make disciples, it will require discipleship being a core value of our churches.

It seems that we are missing a big part of the Great Commission. While the church has learned to “go,” and it has become skilled at baptizing, it is lacking when it comes to teaching and discipleship. Notice, Jesus says we are to *make* disciples. In other words, there will be some work involved. Disciples aren’t created overnight—they must be *made*. Discipleship is not a one-time event; it’s a process. When I got married, I made a public commitment to my husband in front of 150 family and friends. How strange it would have been if I had said my vows, only to go home and leave my husband at the altar. Sadly, this is exactly what is happening in many of our churches today. A person says a prayer and is even baptized, but we never teach them how to take Jesus home with them. Essentially, they have made a commitment, and they go home, leaving Jesus standing at the altar. Often, we never see the person again. What happened? We stopped short at evangelism and failed to make disciples. We birthed the baby, but we had no plan in place to help that baby grow.

Jesus modeled the importance of discipleship by spending most of his ministry with just 12 men. These men literally changed the world! Shouldn’t we be doing what He modeled? Just to be sure we couldn’t miss it, Jesus came down to earth to *show* us the way. If we think the Christian experience is merely attending church, we are missing so much of what Jesus modeled while He was on earth. Jesus really was the

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ultimate small group leader. Every church must make it a priority to have a thriving, growing, and healthy small group ministry where people are being discipled.

Every pastor should be asking, “Are the people who are coming to my church truly disciples of Christ?” “Do I know the spiritual condition of the people in the pews?” If we are honest, we probably do not know. And, to be fair, we usually can’t know every person’s spiritual condition. However, we can ask our small group leaders those same questions, and they may have a better idea. I believe these leaders are the greatest asset to the pastor in helping the church to fulfill the Great Commission. Our time on earth is short. We must fulfill the Great Commission of our Savior. After all, what good is a hospital if people leave just as sick as when they came? What good is the church if we aren’t making disciples? ■

Debi Roam is Discipleship pastor at Twin Rivers Worship Center in Saint Louis, Missouri.

“I Love You . . . But I Want a DIVORCE”

Turning Back the Tide of Christian Divorce

by JERRY ROGERS

ASKED HER, “Do you love him?” She paused, then with tears running down her face, looked at her husband and answered, “I love him, and I miss many things about him . . . but I want a divorce.”

So began another counseling session with a Christian couple heading toward a divorce.

Unfortunately in today’s church world, the number of Christian couples seeking divorce is on the increase and, by some reports, is equal to the secular average. In

2008, a report by the Barna Group stated: “When evangelicals and non-evangelical born-again Christians are combined into an aggregate class of born-again adults, their divorce figure is statistically identical to that of non-born-again adults: 32 percent versus 33 percent, respectively.” Sadly, some of the statistics have indicated that the “Bible Belt” of the United States has seen the biggest increase of divorce in the past few years, and



that increase was among those who were professing Christians at the time of their marriage.

As a counselor and minister, it is sad to see the many couples who seem to tell me the same story over and over again. Although the couples are different, the story in its basic form is the same. Yes, there are different circumstances and events surrounding each couple, yet there are some basic things that always seem to be at the core of the strife in the marriage. These core problems they all share aren't money, adultery, or sexual intimacy. Though these areas are sometimes the issue(s), they are not common among all those whom I have counseled. Scripture gives us some insight as to what they are.

SOME SCRIPTURAL COMMANDS FOR THE COUPLE

First, take a look at what Scripture says about what the husband is commanded to do toward his wife.

- **Ephesians 5:25:** "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (KJV).
- **Ephesians 5:28:** "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (KJV).
- **Ephesians 5:33:** "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (KJV).

SO JUST WHAT ARE THE COMMONALITIES AMONG THESE COUPLES WHO HAVE COME FOR COUNSELING? THEY ARE THE LACK OF LOVE AND RESPECT EXISTING IN THE MARRIAGE.

In the verses above, the husband is commanded to love his wife with an agape love. Now consider what the Scripture says about what the wife is commanded to do toward her husband.

- **Ephesians 5:33:** "Nevertheless each of you must also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (World English Bible).

Here we see that the wife is commanded to reverence or respect her husband. So just what are the commonalities among these couples who have come for counseling? They are the lack of love and respect existing in the marriage—the lack of agape love on the part of the man toward his wife, and the lack of reverence (respect) on the part of woman toward her husband.

HOW CAN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION HELP?

What can the local church do to help stave off the growing trend of divorce in our congregations? Though the question is simple enough, the answer is not. Many things

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WHO ARE DIVORCING.

lead to a divorce. I know that firsthand as a counselor. If we were able to teach our couples some basic Bible-based relationship principles, we might begin to head off the rising increase of Christians who are divorcing. Here are some examples of how the congregation can help:

- Offer good teaching in an elective marriage class or even from the pulpit on what is commanded by God for the husband and wife to show toward one another.
- Create a weekend getaway, conference, or retreat for married couples using trained ministers, Christian counselors, or therapists who may already be in your congregation just waiting to be asked to do something for the Lord.
- Reinforce the fact that going to a getaway, conference, or retreat is NOT a public statement that their marriage is in trouble or having problems.
- Tell the couples that even seeking professional counseling (preferably faith-based), if needed, is neither wrong nor unscriptural.

- Pastors need to recognize the fact that some situations may require more than what you are trained to do and be willing to refer the counselees to a trained Christian counselor or therapist.

To pastors who want to employ these suggestions, these may seem simplistic. However, I cannot emphasize enough the number of couples who have told me that they wish they would have had some form of class, retreat, or seminar offered at their church. They also said if they had received some of these Bible-based relationship basics, they would not be in the trouble they are currently experiencing.

To couples who find themselves in some form of distress in their marriage, I would suggest they study Ephesians chapter 5, the entire book of Song of Solomon, and seek out a trained pastor, Christian counselor, or therapist.

As the body of Christ, let us unite together in helping to turn the tide of Christian divorce, let us pray and ask the God who created marriage to build a spiritual hedge around all families that they will stand against the anti-family culture which daily attacks our families. ■

***Jerry Rogers, Ph.D.** serves as a care and counseling minister at the Stratford Heights Church of God in Middletown, Ohio. He holds Exhorter credentials in the Church of God. He earned the degrees of Ph.D. in clinical Christian psychology and a master's degree in divinity studies, and is a licensed professional counselor in the state of Ohio. (JLR12@sbcglobal.net).*

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Assistant General Overseer
Speaker Bishop H.G. Poltner Legacy Dedication
Thursday
Sponsored by The Poltner Family and
Pentecostal Theological Seminary

Lord
Mold
Assimilate
Know
Empower
Us one
Ephesians 4:13



Bishop Brandon Porter
Thursday 7:00pm



Dr. Daniel Vassell, Sr.
Young Adult Extravaganza
Friday Immediately Following Service



Bishop Philip & Tracey Bonaparte, MD
Medical Screening Clinic
Friday
Sponsored by New Hope Church of God



Pastor Diane Jacques-St. Surin, Esq.
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Bishop P. Douglas Small
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Evangelist Joycelyn Barnett
Saturday 10:00am

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B E Y O N D Burnout

by ROGER DANIEL

ARE THE DYSFUNCTION and impairment caused by burnout reversible? Is recovery really possible? No, not in the sense that one's previous state is restored as though burnout had never occurred. Critical life-encounters, including burnout—*especially* burnout—usually mark us for life, and like Jacob we journey on with a limp (see Gen. 32:24-25; Heb. 11:21). But it is possible to move beyond burnout to a new normal that is both productive and meaningful. God can bring honey from the lion's carcass (Judges 14:8).

In response to the growing problem of ministerial burnout, a profusion of books, articles, and websites offer a variety of strategies to mitigate the threat and overcome its residual effects. Suggested treatments usually emphasize the need for . . .

- Self-care: rest, diet, exercise, vacations, sabbaticals, etc.
- Spiritual care: prayer, Scripture, refocusing on God, spiritual intimacy, etc.
- Support: avoiding isolation, forming supportive communities, etc.

- Boundaries: learning to say “no,” eliminating over-functioning, etc.
- Reassessment: goals, priorities, expectations, etc.
- Professional help: physical exam, medical intervention, counseling, etc.

All of these are valid, but most are focused on external, systemic stressors while overlooking the deeper, inner conflicts that often lie at the very heart of burnout.

THE SINKHOLE PHENOMENON

Sinkholes are a common problem in the state of Florida. They occur when ground water moves through the earth's substructure and erodes large cavities in the limestone bedrock. When water fills the cavity, it supports the walls and ceiling, “but if the water-table drops, the cavity is exposed to further erosional processes that eventually result in the collapse of the cavity, causing a surface indenture, or sinkhole.”¹ A major contributing factor is the thickness of the “overburden”—the sediments, organic matter, or man-made structures on the surface.

The loss of support from beneath combined with excessive weight from above produce a collapse that is usually sudden and surprising. But the unseen erosion causing the crash has actually been at work for years, perhaps decades. The end result is not only a cavernous hole, but also the disintegration of all that rested on the surface.

The sinkhole phenomenon provides an accurate depiction of the current crisis among evangelical ministers. They are caught in a vise, relentlessly squeezed between the two pressure points of *internal erosion* and *external pressure*.

Understanding how clergy, who begin their careers with high idealism, optimism, and compassion, burn out is difficult. One body of research suggests that clergy, among others, burn out because of the systems in which they work. From this perspective, burnout is the result of external systemic factors such as bureaucracy, poor administrative support, and difficult work conditions. The other body of research suggests that burnout is the result of intrapersonal factors such as high idealism, Type-A personality, narcissism, and perfectionism. It is our position that these two bodies of research are compatible.²

The interaction of internal and external influences is described by Miriam Greenspan as an “inescapable relationship between individual heartbreak and the brokenheartedness of the world.”³ She argues that personal suffering cannot be disassociated from its larger context; that emotions do not exist “inside” us in isolation from

the world “outside;” that “many seemingly ‘private wounds’ are rooted in a *damaged and damaging social environment*.”⁴

In recent years, the ministry environment has become increasingly toxic and may be accurately described as both damaged and damaging. The excessive overburden alone, created by the ecclesiastical systems and cultural milieu of our time, would probably be sufficient in and of itself to generate a collapse. But the excessive overburden is not at work alone. Its allies are the unresolved intrapersonal issues that erode the foundation from within, making collapse nearly inevitable.

Calvin Miller offered sage advice when he said, “Before we go out to heal, we need to check our own health.”⁵ But many enter the ministry with little self-awareness, unsuspecting of their own brokenness and the manner in which their own *personal formational deficiencies*, many rooted in childhood, create a high susceptibility to burnout and the toxic emotions that accompany it. Many of the irrational beliefs that torment ministers and induce high levels of stress are born from deficient spiritual formation.

The failure to recognize this has given birth to simplistic remedies that fail because they do not address the fundamental causes. For example, a minister suffering from burnout may indeed require a vacation or sabbatical. But the job will not change while he or she is away, and the respite invariably ends with a return to the same systemic stressors that contributed to burnout in the first place.

Further, if personal formational deficiencies remain unresolved and inward wounds are left untended, he or she may be rested physically, but still not healed emotionally or spiritually. It will only be a matter of time until he or she needs another sabbatical or takes a permanent vacation by leaving the ministry entirely. Trapped by age or lack of viable employment possibilities elsewhere, others are forced to remain and grind it out.

The whipsaw of internal erosion and external pressure not only helps to clarify the root causes of the crisis, but also it points toward a possible solution. No analysis of or remedy for the problem could be regarded as realistic that does not adequately confront both *professional* and *personal* concerns.

THE COURAGE TO ASK FOR HELP

Ministers tend to be highly reluctant to disclose personal struggles and reticent in asking for help. This attitude may arise from deep mistrust and the perception that there is no safe place; it may also be regarded as unspiritual and a lack of faith; or it could stem from a perceived need to maintain stereotyped ministerial images.

This reticence is particularly obvious when it comes to the need for counseling. Relying on professional help when one is sick (doctors) or have legal issues (lawyers) is regarded as normal and wise. But seeking help from a Christian counselor is often dismissed, if considered at all. The irony here is that counselors actually provide the safe place ministers need to disclose personal matters openly with confidentiality assured.

Confronting unresolved personal issues is not a simple matter. Just as a fish cannot detect the impurities in the water in which it swims, we are often unable to perceive our own brokenness or understand its effects. A qualified counselor can guide the process of self-discovery, help us confront formational deficiencies, and provide invaluable insight to help us move forward.

Rarely does anyone progress beyond burnout without help from others. A critical ingredient of God's intervention with Elijah was to give him a companion (see 1 Kings 19:3-4, 16, 19-21). The preacher (Solomon) reminds us, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up" (Eccles. 4:9-10 NASB)."

Asking for help is a sign of wisdom, not weakness. ■



- 1 <http://aquat1.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/sinkholes.htm>, Plant Management in Florida Waters (Internet)
- 2 William N. Grosch and David C. Olsen. "Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* (June, 2006) 1.
- 3 Merriam Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003) xiv.
- 4 Ibid. p. 209, 210 (emphasis added).
- 5 Calvin Miller, *The Vanishing Evangelical: Saving the Church From Its Own Success by Restoring What Really Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013) 47.

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HIRING and MAINTAINING a CHURCH STAFF

by GEORGE MOXLEY

WHEN THE VISION is bigger than the ability of one, God has a plan to expand. That is an easy statement to make, but one that is truer than what we often allow it to be. The average church in America has an attendance of approximately 87 people on a weekly basis. One of the primary reasons is because that is all the average person can pastor. I am certainly no expert, but I have pastored as low as 18 and as high as 1,100. I have learned as much by trial and error as I have from mentoring and training.

To begin, I haven't always been in the ministry. When God called me, I had a career as a nuclear welder. I was saved April 16, 1989, called to preach January 7, 1990, and began pastoring my first church November 6, 1990, at the age of 28. I had learned how to work and how to work with people before I received the call of God to step into ministry. There is a difference in secular employment and ministry, but there are also many similarities.

The first thing a pastor and church should decide is the timing of bringing on



staff. Most churches need additional staff before they can actually afford to pay them. This means burnout, and frustrations occur in both the pastor and volunteers. How do you know when it is time? Waiting until you can afford them is like waiting until you can afford children before you get married.

Faith is crucial, but we also must understand that money follows ministry. If the right person is added to your church staff, he or she will pay for himself or herself with church growth. Don't burn out and give up on the vision because of lack of funds. God really does own it all!!! I have hired staff that became a detriment, but I have also hired staff that became crucial to the vision and were tremendous assets to both the vision and the church. Remember, in the secular world, one must produce in order to keep one's job. This same principle should be followed in the ministry world.

Often, staff members desire secular benefits with a volunteer schedule. This can never work if you expect to grow for the Kingdom. The reason the nuclear plant paid me their top pay scale and furnished my insurance, social security, and retirement is that I made welds that kept them running and growing so they might produce more power, thereby bringing in more income for them.

The Scripture says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (KJV). Ministry is the most important job on this earth. If we fail to produce, people die and go to Hell,

staying there for eternity. So when deciding on timing, remember ministry is more about outcome than income.

Once the timing is settled, begin to focus on exactly what the church needs. Most churches cannot justify special ministries alone. When adding staff, the person must be part of the team and willing to do more than the scope of their priority and specialty. A good example might be a music pastor who refuses to visit parishioners. Jeremiah says, "Woe be to my pastors who haven't visited my sheep" (23:2 paraphrase). Ministry is never confined by job title. A staff person who doesn't make a good member will never lead nor last on a growing church team.

Now that timing is settled and the need is obvious, it's time to find the person. I have learned there are different callings on people looking for positions on a church staff. Some are called to be an Aaron. Moses could never have accomplished the feats God had planned for him without Aaron. So often we do not celebrate them or give them the recognition they deserve. Their calling is to help fulfill the vision of Moses. Too many times staff people think they are not validated unless they become a senior pastor and, instead of helping to catapult a church to 1,000, they settle with less than what God intended to be accomplished.

Other people are called to be a Joshua. They are sent by God to work at a church as an undershepherd to learn what Moses knows and then move on to another appointment. This is hard to understand at times, but necessary for expansion of the

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Kingdom. I have had six different youth pastors who went on to become senior pastors and, although I hated to see them go, they are all doing great works and expanding the kingdom of God. Learn to let them go. I am not talking about the ones who get a group of people to leave and only grow from taking them from their home church. I mean the ones who are genuinely called, with a God-given vision for a different area. Bless them and continue to support them to further the Kingdom.

Then there are those who want to be on a church staff for glamour and glory. They seem to be more like Judas. It's all about the money. Shepherds lay down their lives for the sheep, but hirelings flee. John 10:13 says, "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" (KJV). Even Jesus had a Judas on his staff. Don't let a bad staff member keep you from adding the right people to your team.

All across our nation, pastors and churches are divided because of a staff member with the wrong motive or spirit. Some only want to join your team to embellish their

resumes while looking for the next opportunity. As they look for promotions, sadly, they are not looking at the harvest. Other staff members may try to entice people to feel sorry for them, leading your parishioners away from what they know is true.

I once had a staff member who had repeated moral failures. He refused restoration, but instead led people away and started an independent work. People who had been faithful felt sorry for him and followed him. Today, he has continuous moral failures, because his problems were never dealt with biblically. I used this story because it happens all across our land. We cannot let incidences such as this stop our purpose and vision. We should be bold enough to make the changes when necessary either by counseling, mentoring, or dismissal. We should never pay salaries to people who do not produce—the same as not paying a plumber who does not fix our sink. People do not always do what you expect, but they will do what you inspect. The need for a ministry team is great, but one should know that anything with two heads is a monster.

What a blessing when the right team is in place with the right purpose. Things happen at a greater pace when there is unity. My prayer for the church today is that God will continue to send the right people to the right places for the right time.

When hiring staff, we must be proactive and purposeful, but most of all, approach it prayerfully. Together, we must do what God has put inside of us to do to bring growth to the kingdom of God! ■



COCOA STRONG

by ANTHONY PELT

UNITY IS A NOBLE DESIRE; however, it is quite elusive. In this day of diversity, independence is lauded over interdependence. How does one cajole, or convince a group of diverse people that unity will not dampen their uniqueness but can be the synergy to fulfill destiny.

As a new administrative bishop, I found myself staring at this dilemma. I had to come up with a way to let those I serve know that I cared; we were connected, and we have what it takes to conquer any obstacle.

My Facebook page provided me a way to convey my care and concern for Florida-Cocoa. I had no idea what a hashtag was, but I was struck by the fact that they were everywhere. In the old days, the symbol (#) was known as pound, but today the (#) symbol draws attention to little sayings. I pretty much ended all my postings with “Be Radiant” (#beradiant), but one day I felt a nudge to add “Cocoa Strong” (#cocoas-strong), and lo and behold it stuck! As a son of the soil, I serve many whom I have known all my life. They fed me, taught me, encouraged me, and have always shown their love for me. I wanted them to know that I was honored to be an administrative

bishop, but I was doubly honored to serve in the Florida-Cocoa office.

Florida-Cocoa is a diverse region. Many assume we are monolithic, but we are varied in so many ways. Our differences however, if not kept in check, could overtake us and blot out the blessings we are experiencing. “Cocoa Strong” has become a phrase of connection. As I travel across the state, saints now routinely greet me with a hearty “Cocoa Strong.” The phrase has become an important link to remind us that no matter in what city our church is located, we are connected.

Like many organizations, Florida-Cocoa has experienced its own ebbs and flows. Some started to believe that our best was behind us, but “Cocoa Strong” has become a rallying cry to remind us that with care and connection we can conquer. I draw strength from “Cocoa Strong” knowing that my new task of administrative bishop is supported by people who have faith in me and faith for the journey.

I know it might be a little corny, but I break out “Cocoa Strong” as often as I can. I draw great delight when my Facebook page fills up with #cocoasstrong. I am filled with great joy when the great company of saints shout, “We are Cocoa Strong!” at our state gatherings. I get a real “kick” when some outside our fellowship approach me and ask: “Bishop, are you Cocoa-Strong?” My response is a quick and enthusiastic: “All Day Long.” ■

Anthony Pelt serves as administrative bishop of the Florida-Cocoa State Offices.

A person in a dark suit stands with their back to the camera in a field of tall grass. They are holding a black umbrella. The sky is dark and cloudy, with a bright lightning bolt striking down to the left. The overall mood is dramatic and contemplative.

What Our STORMS Teach Us

by BILL ISAACS



IT IS ONE OF MY favorite verses in the Bible...I quote it often: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6 NASB). One of the great struggles of the human soul is the question of God's presence in times of difficulty. We were made for connection with the divine, and our souls yearn to know God is near when we find ourselves in times of crisis. Because of this, the Enemy works to separate us from God and to make us feel isolated. We must always remember the faithfulness of God's promise and know that at no time does He fail to keep His Word to remain near to us, even in dark moments.

On August 29, 2005, while in Louisiana, I survived Hurricane Katrina. Straight-line winds of 160 mph in a Category 5 hurricane destroyed much of the Gulf Coast and displaced millions of people. I remember the day vividly—the fierce wind, the howling tornados, the pelting debris, and the flooding. Most of us lost power, and we had no idea what was going on elsewhere. In fact, information was not easily gained in those first hours. Everything was destroyed. Wondering what was going on, some ventured out to see for themselves and met peril. The wiser ones remained inside the shelters available to them and waited for the storm to pass. Those first 48 hours were

long and lonely. Because electricity had been knocked out, darkness came early and was not a comfortable companion when uncertainty was so near.

Without TV, information was spotty. The news was grim. Communication was limited, and what news did get through was not good. Throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, and parts of Alabama, life was in question for many, and others were about to enter a dark and depressing season of time when the storm passed and they began to assess the damage they had endured.

At some point, when storms come, one begins to consider deeper questions of God and His presence in such moments. You reach out for Him in the quiet of your soul and find strength in the promises of His Word, but you wonder—*where is God in all this? Is He aware, and if so, could He not do something to stop this?* It may be a physical storm or a storm in your family or a financial storm that is buffeting your soul. Regardless of the type of storm, you will have questions.

Katrina devastated us. In parts of New Orleans, many victims were swept away by the rising water and later found miles from their original location. Some bodies were found underneath collapsed homes and buildings. Remarkably, some people tried to swim out of the flooded areas only to die in the effort. The body count would be almost a thousand in New Orleans alone. Hundreds of people were never accounted for, and it is believed their bodies were taken out to sea by the storm surge that overtook the area. In the

aftermath and cleanup, there were many questions but few answers.

In Mark 4, a threatening storm aroused the fear and panic of the disciples, many of whom were sea-faring men. You and I can certainly empathize with their emotional instability. Situations can create strange emotional responses, even for the most faithful. In their fear, they posed a most interesting question to Jesus, whom we discover is sleeping amidst this incredible experience: "And they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" It is highly unlikely that in a calmer scenario, the disciples would have ventured such a question. However, their present situation caused them to wonder why Jesus was not doing something about their peril!

Living through the experience and now at times looking through the rearview mirror has enabled me to process several personal theological points. They are offered for consideration and encouragement as you consider your own life and stormy seasons.

GOD'S PRESENCE DOES NOT PREVENT DESTRUCTION

In the aftermath, I heard preachers and others speculate that in some way this storm and devastation is the result of God's judgment upon our region. It is not a credible thought in my view, because it presupposes God judged the evil of this region and yet left untouched the more visible evilness in New Orleans. The places such judgment would likely have fallen were virtually unscathed. It is also unlikely that specific

judgment was singled out against the people of this region, as opposed to other places, because it does not balance with God's sense of righteous judgment.

Rather, I think it is important to remember that natural law has its place in God's plans for the world. Winds, storms, rain, and other meteorological considerations are part of a natural plan God has for the world. While God is who He is and can stop or start anything He chooses, such phenomena are common to the whole earth. Just recently, a devastating earthquake destroyed Nepal and millions are suffering. No, it is not simply punitive judgment that brings storms to us. That's too easy!

Theologically, God is omnipresent, meaning He is present at all times. No space or time is void of God's presence, and we are strengthened to remember this. God is faithful, and His presence can be counted on whether in storm or peace. My point is simply that God's presence on the earth does not prevent calamity or destruction such as Katrina caused. Storms happen, and when they do, we can be sure God is present to help us.

GOD'S PRESENCE ENABLES PEACE

In our review of Mark 4, we found after Jesus spoke to the stormy winds and waves, the result was a peace, which amazed the disciples. Peace does that. When it comes, it changes the atmosphere. Peace stills the troubled soul and provides a sense of comfort from the striving when peace is absent.

The disciples knew He was with them, but in the moment of their discovery, they found that His presence enabled peace beyond description.

This peace is not the absence of difficult times; in fact, the amazing thing about the peace of God is that often it is present despite troubling times. The believer can find peace while the whole world is coming apart. It defies logic, and causes the unacquainted to wonder about its veracity. Yet, when it comes, you will know that the atmosphere is changed. No matter what your storm is right now, know this...

- **God is near**—If He is near, there is no need to fear.

- **God is in charge**—No storm, no situation can dictate to God.

- **God is aware**—Nothing catches God by surprise in your life or mine.

GOD'S PRESENCE BECOMES A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

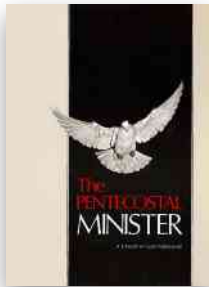
It can be easy to get “stuck” in the present as we deal with the impact of our storms. However, the greater challenges lie in our future. Several weeks and months after our storm, it was common to read in the newspaper or hear commentators say, “Life will never again be the same after Katrina.” While that was true, there was a future that God was protecting, and we lived in that. Your stormy seasons will not prevent your future. “*For I know the plans that I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope*” (Jeremiah 29:11 NASB). You

THIS PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF DIFFICULT TIMES; IN FACT, THE AMAZING THING ABOUT THE PEACE OF GOD IS THAT OFTEN IT IS PRESENT DESPITE TROUBLING TIMES. THE BELIEVER CAN FIND PEACE WHILE THE WHOLE WORLD IS COMING APART.

will get beyond this moment and embrace your tomorrow. There will be another day. Louisiana was never the same—it was better. Your tomorrow will be better as well. Trust it. God promises you that He has this stormy moment in His hand, and He will protect you until the clouds have passed and bring you to the fulfillment of every promise He has ever made.

“Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, **for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go**” (Joshua 1:9 NASB, emphasis mine). ■

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The Pentecostal Minister Flashback will reprint articles from the forerunner of Engage. The articles will be presented as they were originally written, so dates and cultural references will reflect the period. However, most of the advice and research is still applicable to ministry today.

Pentecostal Minister **FLASH BACK**

DANGER OF THE DOLLAR

By W. W. Thomas • Summer 1988

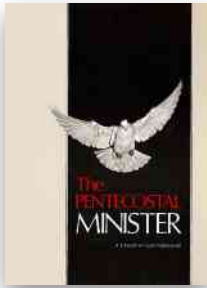
IF ONE IS SUCCESSFUL in financial ventures, it is easy to transfer his trust and affection from God to money, thus allowing money to become his first love.

Money and one's ministry are irrevocably joined together. This is a truce despite the dangers of money's allurements and the warning of our Lord, who said: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13 NASB).

We may either serve God and use money, or serve money and use God. Jesus taught that wealth is deceitful and its bondage is subtle. One is reminded of the flypaper and the fly. The fly lands on the sticky substance thinking, "My flypaper," only to discover that the flypaper is saying, "My fly!"

Although the minister must deal with finances, he often feels inept at the task. Some ministers are embarrassed to talk about money because it seems so "carnal" and "unspiritual." Material things represent the selfishness of life and seem to contradict a commitment to self-denial.

But the truth is that money frequently is a spiritual issue that touches the core of a person's values reflected in his checkbook. Those values reflect one's priorities by revealing to whom he gives and how and for what he spends his money. Giving thought to



money and possessions is important because we must deal with money matters—money does matter. This is not to say that we should look at the world through “financial lenses.” On the other hand, we do not have to be rooted in a “blessed-are-the-poor” attitude and a “poverty-vow” mentality.

In the early days of Pentecostalism, the pain of poverty was seen and felt by most believers. Traditionally, we have assumed that a lifestyle of poverty is symbolic of dedication and righteousness; therefore, we have developed an attitude that sanctifies and spiritualizes poverty. There is an adage which says, “I would rather be a poor man and go to heaven than to be a rich man and go to hell.”

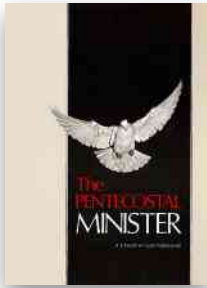
While that statement is true, the implication is as phony as a three-dollar bill. Poverty does not ensure a place in heaven; neither does the possession of money mean that one will be lost. Because of our deep roots in poverty, it is difficult for us to develop a positive attitude toward a preacher who has more of this world’s goods than a bare minimum. There are still some church members who believe that “if you keep the pastor poor, you will keep him humble.”

Ministers have expectations, dreams, and ambitions, as well as financial difficulties just like everyone else; therefore, money is important to them. Some of the ministerial casualties occurring today are the result of insufficient financial resources.

When a minister understands that his children might be deprived of the funds needed for a college education and a lifestyle that would even remotely resemble that of their peer group, his commitment to the ministry is severely tested. Ministers are on the same level as other professionals and are expected to interact socially with other professionals, but their salaries are rarely adequate.

MONEY AND MINISTERIAL SOURCES

Money can, and does, influence a person’s decisions from where to minister, to his productivity, to whether he feels insecure or optimistic. Preachers preach because they are called to



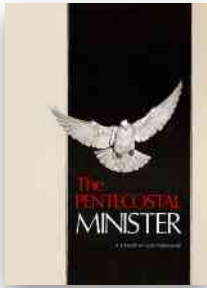
preach; however, the place in which they preach is often influenced by money, benefits, and prestige. If the salary is too low, the results can be inefficient ministerial leadership, carelessness, and certainly preoccupation with making ends meet. The result may be low productivity and general dissatisfaction; when this is so, God's work is not done. When money is going out faster than an individual can bring it home, then everyone tends to worry, and one may get angry and become nervous and impatient.

The brightest, best, most ambitious, and most aggressive clergy are generally those who are paid the best. Whether this is a natural reward for their accomplishments or an incentive that motivates is a matter of judgment. Our Lord himself commended aspiring and ambitious men who demonstrated ability in business and in making money, but He condemned the sluggard.

Men who are honest in every deed, have faith in every trust, and righteous and just in all acts will receive not only the praise of the Lord but also success in their work. It is not unchristian for people to apply their God-given wisdom and abilities to achieving financial success so long as they strive lawfully with the intention of carrying out the Lord's program in its entirety, which includes sharing with the less fortunate.

Sufficient financial resources are absolutely necessary in order to carry on a positive ministry. The amount of money given to the minister must be fair, equitable, and adequate. Some members will always believe that any amount of money above a bare minimum is extravagant, for after all, the minister is serving the Lord; therefore, money should not be a consideration! Thankfully, others believe that a low salary is demeaning to the man of God.

God did not intend for us to barely survive and function only as a physical organism. We are made in the image of God. God expects our spiritual nature to be a reflection of His creative power; therefore, man is a solver of problems, a healer, an artist, a musician, a writer, and more. We need not only physical necessities, but also those things that give our life quality, pleasure, satisfaction,



meaning, and forward movement. Money plays an important role in achieving intangible goals, as well as tangible rewards.

One of America's most noted fictional characters is Snoopy. He does not know that he is a dog. As a matter of fact, he hates dogs, and if he were human, he would not even own one. One of the things that you will find Snoopy doing is piloting a Sopwith Camel airplane in the First World War, looking for the Red Baron. Ironically, he is not only fighting a war that is over, but he is also losing a war that has already been won.

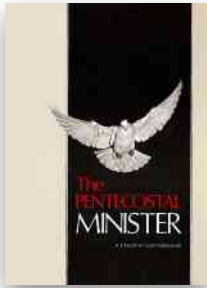
THE DOLLAR AND MORALS

Though money is necessary, there are hundreds of verses in the Bible which warn of its dangers. One of the most frequently misquoted reads, "Money is the root of all evil." That is not exactly what the Bible says. Money is morally neutral but alarmingly dangerous.

Money can be used to evangelize the world and carry on beneficial, benevolent ministries, or it can be used to purchase illegal drugs and promote immorality. The evil is not in the *money* but in the mind of the person who possesses it. A wrong attitude toward affluence can corrupt a man's morals and allow him to involve himself in sinful pursuits.

Yet, the Scriptures focus on men like Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, and Joseph of Arimathea, who were both rich and righteous, fabulously wealthy, yet faithful to God. A person can possess money and keep his integrity, maintain a close relationship with God, and be involved in a positive ministry. In his book *Mountains in the Mist*, F. J. Boreham offers this maxim which speaks of both the blessings and curses of money:

Dug from the mountain, washed in the glen,
Servant am I, or the master of men;
Steal me, I curse you; Earn me, I bless you,
Grasp me and hoard me, a fiend shall possess you.
Lie for me, die for me, covet me, take me,
Angel or devil, I am what you make me—MONEY!



THE DOLLAR AND OUR PERSPECTIVE

It is so easy to get into the “if only” syndrome. If only I had a larger salary, I could be more effective. If only I had more discretionary funds, my family could enjoy the lifestyle it deserves. Christina Onassis said: “Happiness is not based on money, and the best proof of this is our family.” Solomon had an income of more than \$25 million a year, lived in a palace which took thirteen years to build, owned 40,000 stalls of horses, sat on an ivory throne overlaid with gold, and had a daily menu of a hundred sheep and thirty oxen plus deer and fatter fowl; yet he said:

He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income (Ecclesiastes 5:10, 11 TLB).

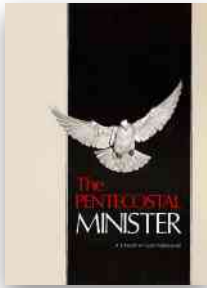
Solomon was saying that money will bring neither contentment nor happiness. Money will buy a bed, but not sleep; books, but not brains; food, but not an appetite; a house, but not a home; medicine, but not health; luxuries, but not culture; amusement, but not happiness; a crucifix, but not a Savior.

THE DOLLAR CAN DIVERT

If a person has money, it is easy for him to trust in tangible things rather than in the invisible heavenly Father. The temptation is to buy his way out of a problem rather than to pray through the difficulty. However, God wants us to trust His guidance. J. Hudson Taylor said, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack for funds.” If our dreams and desires for ministry reflect the heart of God, then God will supply the money. The visions which honor God are those expressed in basic terms, such as reaching the lost, edifying believers, spreading missions, and helping the poor and needy.

INVESTMENTS AND SAVINGS

A minister experiences enormous pressure to generate additional revenue from nonministerial sources in order to fund the



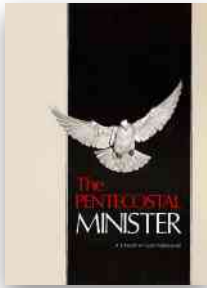
needs of his family and give them a standard of living which resembles that of their peers. Also, he has obligations to be equally social with other professionals with superior salaries, provide the finances to support a positive ministry, and secure for himself a reasonably comfortable retirement. Because of the need for additional funds and because many congregations are unwilling or unable, or lack the motivation to provide these funds, some ministers rely upon other full-time or part-time employment or engage in business ventures and investment opportunities.

Someone has said that the average American family is three weeks away from bankruptcy. Conditions may not be that critical, but the average ministerial family has little or no money saved and few, if any, reasonable investments. One of the fundamental principles in the “pyramid of contentment” is investments. If we are going to be faithful and wise stewards, we must strike a balance between trusting God for both our present and future needs, as well as taking the necessary steps to plan for them.

Solomon said, “The wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets” (Proverbs 21:20 TLB). A minister’s integrity and credibility may be in question when he has little or no money saved, a large amount of fixed expenses, unreasonable credit obligations, and is totally dependent on next week’s salary in order to remain solvent. When one is pushing to the very back of his financial wall, what does he do if an emergency occurs? Is it not tragic that some consider saving and investing an indication that we are nonspiritual and do not trust God?

Practicing the “Joseph principle” (Genesis 42) and gaining wisdom from observing the ant (Proverbs 30:25) would help in providing the necessary funds for both present and future needs. Savings and investments provide future funds for unexpected events, enable us to purchase things without paying the high cost of consumer credit, and provide resources for future financial security.

Saving should become a habit so that one develops a systematic program for regular saving, based upon a predetermined



percentage of one's income. The greatest enemy of saving is procrastination and not disciplining oneself to deny present gratifications for future benefits (the "deferred gratification" principle).

THE DANGER OF OVERINVOLVEMENT

While space does not allow discussion of how a person should invest or what financial ventures are most profitable, it is imperative that a note of warning be sounded relative to the dangers of wrong ventures and overinvolvement. If one is successful in financial ventures, it is easy to transfer his trust and affection from God to money and to allow money to become his first love.

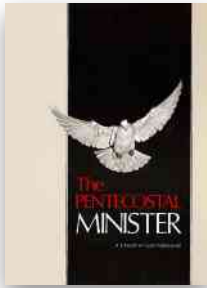
Paul warned young Timothy, "For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows. O Timothy, you are God's man. Run from all these evil things" (1 Timothy 6:10, 11 TLB). A cure for the love of money is liberal giving and sharing.

The need or desire to secure large, quick, and effortless returns on investments has led some ministers to invest in unusual, risky, speculative ventures. Solomon said:

There is another serious problem I have seen everywhere—savings are put into risky investments that turn sour, and soon there is nothing left to pass on to one's son. The man who speculates is soon back where he began—with nothing. This, as I said, is a very serious problem, for all his hard work has been for nothing; he has been working for the wind. It is all swept away (Ecclesiastes 5:13-16 TLB).

When this happens, a minister may lose something more important than money. His credibility may be damaged and his integrity questioned.

Should a minister invest in a risky venture? If the prospect of profit is unbelievably large and practically guaranteed, and if the decision must be immediate, a red flag should wave in one's mind. Sometimes the person who is enticing another is a friend or one who has an excellent record and appears to be doing a



great favor. While attractive tax incentives are important and the investment may seem to require little effort, it is imperative that one investigates carefully, especially if one knows little or nothing about the investment.

Be cautious, for very few people acquire large sums of money instantly except in lotteries or at the race track. Remember the financial principle that “Risk rarely equals the promised rate of return!” As ministers we are to be examples in all things, which includes our finances; therefore, we must guard against shaming God’s work with poor investing.

PROMPTNESS IN PAYING DEBTS

Ministerial integrity is an indispensable quality in effective spiritual leadership. It is the heart and soul of our moral life and reflects an honest, upright, and impeccable character. Integrity means that we keep our promises that we can be trusted, that we are loyal, and that we are dependable. Paul said to Titus, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7 KJV). In reflecting upon his own lifestyle, Paul said, “Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man” (2 Corinthians 7:2 KJV).

As spiritual leaders, we must remember that we are mentors and role models for the masses. What we are, the church in general is becoming. A minister’s profound influence on the laity is incalculable. We are scrutinized and passionately imitated, which places upon them an extraordinary responsibility.

God has brought ministers to their place of leadership so that they can show the masses the way through the darkness of moral confusion. In responding to financial obligations in a Christian manner, the integrity of the ministry is maintained and the minister’s ability to influence others in their moral responsibility is enhanced. ■

W.W. Thomas, Sr., has been pastor of the West Lakeland, Florida, Church of God for thirty-one years.



by J. LEE GRADY

How to Pray When Terrorists Are Beheading Christians

LAST FEBRUARY IN LIBYA, masked militants linked to the ISIS terrorist group led 21 Egyptian Christian men to the Mediterranean shore and made them kneel. Then the terrorists took out knives and cut each man's head off.

As blood mixed with salt water to create a grisly red tide, one of the militants issued a threat to all Westerners: "We will fight you all together. The sea you have hidden Sheikh Osama Bin Laden's body in, we swear to Allah we will mix it with your blood."

A recent wave of Islamic beheadings—videotaped and posted online—has reminded the world that ISIS and other ultra-violent Muslim extremist groups are not going away. In 2014, ISIS warriors beheaded Syrian and Lebanese soldiers, American journalists, Japanese Christian journalist Kenji Goto, humanitarian aid workers, and even children of Christian families. And now their terror has spread far beyond Syria.

The terrorists claim to be carrying out the will of Allah, and they cite a passage in the Quran (47:4) to justify their brutality: "Therefore, when ye meet the unbelievers [in fight], smite at their necks." More peaceful Muslims have condemned the extreme behavior of ISIS, but this has not convinced the West that we aren't in danger of worse violence. The stream of blood we saw in 2014 may become a river this year. And Christians in the Middle East are the most vulnerable.

So what can we do? Military action will likely become necessary, especially if terrorists attack our shores. Before that happens, the Christian community must wake up to the need for emergency prayer. Here are six biblical ways you can pray:

1. Pray for a bold witness of the gospel in the midst of persecution. Persecution was a reality in the New Testament Church, but it did not stop the early disciples from spreading the gospel. After Peter and John were arrested and told to stop preaching, they announced: "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20 NASB). Pray that persecuted Christians will not be intimidated or silenced by acts of terror.

2. Pray for supernatural miracles to confirm the gospel.

When the early church faced opposition, they prayed not only for boldness but also for a display of God's power. They prayed in unity in Acts 4:29-30: "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus" (NASB). Pray that God will bare His arm and show the world that He is real, especially to militant Muslims who don't know the Savior.

3. Pray that the seed of the martyrs will produce a harvest of converts.

When an angry crowd stoned Stephen, the first martyr of the early church, he cried out on his knees: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60 NASB). His death was tragic, but it was not in vain. A great outpouring of the Holy Spirit followed his martyrdom. When a born-again Christian gives his or her life for Jesus, God takes note and responds. This could be the greatest hour of spiritual awakening in the Middle East.

4. Pray for heavy conviction to fall on those who persecute the Church.

Saul was bent on arresting and killing the early disciples, and he watched as Stephen was martyred. Yet shortly after Saul launched his terror campaign, he fell on his face on the Damascus road and was dramatically converted (see Acts 9:3-4). This same miracle can happen today to leaders of ISIS. Don't limit God's power—and don't pray vindictive prayers of judgment on these people.

Pray that the most militant persecutors of the Church will have a head-on collision with the Son of God.

5. Pray for angelic protection and intervention. During one wave of persecution against the New Testament Church, an angel appeared in Peter's prison cell, woke him up, and caused his chains to fall off (see Acts 12:7). Later, after King Herod refused to stop his rule of terror, an angel struck him dead (see 12:23). The Bible does not say the church prayed for Herod's death; we should never pray with a vengeful spirit, but we should leave room for the wrath of God when mercy runs out.

6. Pray that the global Christian community will work for peace and justice in the Middle East. We cannot sit back and watch our brothers and sisters being beheaded for their faith while we enjoy our First World comforts. We must be in solidarity with them, not only in prayer but also in action. We should support government and church leaders who are working for reconciliation, humanitarian aid, and protection for victims of injustice.

Our response to this wave of terror cannot be fear—or hatred. Don't just curse the darkness. Be proactive by praying fervently. Ask God to unleash in the Middle East a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will not only bring peace-loving Muslims to Christ, but also bloodthirsty Islamic militants who are sharpening their knives for the next attack. ■

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma magazine.



The Prophetic Voice of 15

NUMBERS, COLORS, words, references to times, names, and places—Is everything in the Bible significant? The answer is yes. There are no coincidences in the Word of God. Every mention of a person, place, color, or number in Scripture can enhance one's understanding of God's intent. Of the 31,000 scriptures, approximately one in six references a number. The number 15 is mentioned 42 times in the Bible, each focusing on five themes that create a vision for success.

1. A Year of Rest: The fifteenth time Noah is mentioned in Scripture is Genesis 7:7. It refers to Noah entering the ark because of the Flood. Genesis 7:20 says, "Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail." He was safe in the ark because God provided a place of rest from the storm. Believers can go to God and find rest (Matt. 11:28-30).

2. A Year of Addition and Extension: Hezekiah received a death sentence in his fourteenth year as king. Hezekiah prayed a fervent prayer that changed the mind of God, and the Lord gave him a 15-year extension to his life. Even if people have gone through a divorce, bankruptcy, loss of a loved one, or been diagnosed with some disease, they should not give up, because God can give a new lease on life.

3. A Year of the Church: In Exodus, the number 15 is connected to the curtains in the Tabernacle. The center curtain was 30 feet wide; and when Jesus died, the veil was

torn in half so believers could gain full access into the presence of God. God reminds His people to enter into His presence and experience a double portion of His glory.

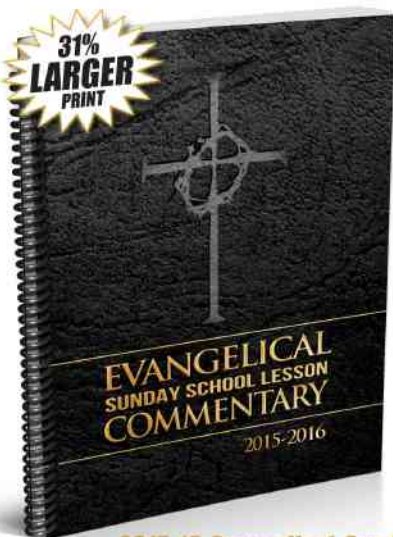
4. A Year of the God-Send: John 1:6 says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1). There are two kinds of people: (1) Thorns in the flesh (those who irritate), and (2) God-sends (those who elevate). John changed the momentum; he shifted the tide and penetrated the darkness with the light of Jesus Christ.

5. A Year of Deliverance: Hosea purchased Gomer, a prostitute, for 15 pieces of silver (Hosea 3:2). Miriam, whose name is mentioned 15 times in the Old Testament, saved Moses' life (see Exodus 2:1-10), and he became the deliverer of Israel. It's not just a delivering *from* something that binds you; it's also a delivering of something *to* you.

This is the year of the Church, so "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered" (Psalm 68:1). God is sending people who are devoted to working together to build the kingdom of God. He is bringing a God-send, and because two are better than one, God's people will be used to bring deliverance and set the captives free in 2015. ■

Bill Jenkins is the author of Fifteen, a recent release that is available via paperback through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or eBook on Kindle.

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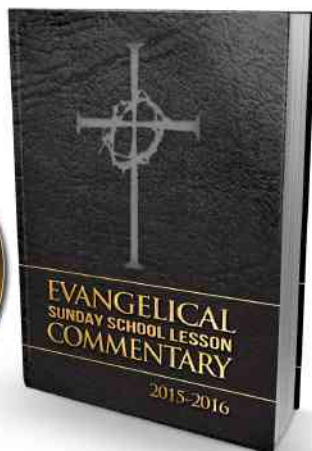
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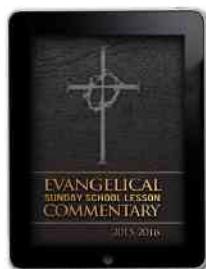
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LEGAL NOTES
Dennis W. Watkins

Don't Fall Prey to Church Seminar Scams

FROM TIME TO TIME, I get calls from frightened participants of seminars presented by “experts” in the fields of church law and accounting. The “experts” spark fear and dread in their attendees!

In response, I received permission from attorney Richard Hammar and his publisher, Christianity Today, to reprint a portion of “Beware of Church Seminar Scams,” an

article Rich wrote for the March/April 2014 issue of *Church Law and Tax Report*. Here is the adapted excerpt:

THE SCAM

Over the past several years, a small number of unscrupulous individuals have engaged in shameful fear tactics to frighten pastors and other church leaders into attending worthless seminars on church and clergy tax issues. Advertising is filled with misrepresentations and gross exaggerations with one goal in mind—to frighten and intimidate church leaders into attending a tax seminar and buying worthless products and services.

Sadly, some individuals use fear tactics to compensate for their total lack of professional qualifications. After all, anyone can appear knowledgeable and authoritative by frightening seminar audiences with phony IRS forms, false reporting requirements, and wild claims about IRS audits of churches and ministers. Few people are knowledgeable enough to question such tactics.

Tragically, many have been duped into attending such seminars, and have purchased



IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBT
ABOUT A SEMINAR LEADER'S
QUALIFICATIONS, ASK THE
SEMINAR SPONSOR TO
**DISCLOSE THE PRESENTER'S
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICA-
TIONS BEFORE SIGNING UP.**

worthless “accounting” and “compliance” services.

Example. One widely promoted and self-proclaimed “expert” has been sued for fraud, investigated by the IRS, and has repeatedly lied to audiences of pastors about his professional qualifications, telling audiences that he is an attorney, a CPA, a college graduate, a tireless lobbyist for churches in Washington, and a frequent spokesman for churches on national news programs and in national publications. All of these claims are false. The “expert” is a college drop-out!

Tip. If you have any doubt about a seminar leader’s qualifications, ask the seminar sponsor to disclose the presenter’s professional qualifications before signing up. If the sponsor informs you that the person is an attorney or CPA, ask for the state or states where he or she is licensed. You can call the bar association or board of accountancy in those states to confirm that the person is a licensed attorney or CPA.

SEMINAR ATTENDANCE PLEDGE

Protect yourself from being ripped off by taking the following pledge:

I understand that the IRS is not targeting churches or ministers for audits or criminal

prosecutions. I also am aware that there are unscrupulous and unqualified individuals who are attempting to frighten church leaders into attending tax seminars with intimidating and misleading advertisements. I will not become a victim of these scams, and I pledge that I:

- Will NOT waste my church’s resources attending a tax seminar as a result of advertising designed to frighten or intimidate me.
- Will NOT attend a seminar without confirming the presenter’s professional qualifications.
- Will NOT waste our church’s resources paying for an “audit” by a seminar leader who is not an attorney or CPA.
- Will NOT purchase any resources at a tax seminar as a result of scare tactics.
- Will NOT attend a tax seminar if the identity and professional qualifications of the presenter are not disclosed in seminar advertising.

CONCLUSION

I recommend that all our constituents avoid these seminars. I further recommend that all our constituents subscribe to *Church Law and Tax Report*. Go to <http://ChurchLawAndTax.com>. These are great resources for you! ■

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



Updated Guidance on Reimbursement of Certain Health Insurance Policies

AS BACKGROUND information, in September 2013, the IRS issued Notice 2013-54 that provided, among other things, that employer health care premium reimbursement arrangements for employee's *individual* health insurance policy premiums created health care plans subject to the Affordable Care Act (often called "ACA" or "ObamaCare"). It was initially believed that one could get around the potential penalty of \$100 per day, per participant, by simply making the employer payment plans ("EPPs") as taxable income to the employee. However, in November 2014, a set of Frequently Asked Questions posted on the Department of Labor's website rebutted that assumption, basically saying that just making the reimbursements with after-tax dollars did not eliminate the potential penalty of \$100 per day.

The November interpretation created much anxiety and fear in the church world,

as well as in the business world, that employers were going to be subject to thousands of dollars in fines. Such fears were heightened when the IRS announced that employers would have to report and "self-assess" these Affordable Care Act violations by filing IRS Form 8928.

As noted in previous updates on this issue, the conversations with Congress, the U.S. Department of Treasury, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Internal Revenue Service continued—and escalated—as efforts were made to eliminate this onerous burden created by the Affordable Care Act. While the efforts were not successful in eliminating these provisions, in February 2015, the Internal Revenue Service issued some temporary relief to churches and other employers in regard to these matters.

In what the Internal Revenue Service called "transitional relief" for employers with fewer than 50 people, they issued IRS Notice 2015-17 on February 18, 2014. While this

notice is written in a question-and-answer format, the “answers” are not as clear and specific as we would like for them to be. Therefore, some of the issues remain subject to interpretation—and various tax lawyers and accounting firms have taken different positions on some of the issues.

The following are issues where there seems to be a consensus of agreement:

- By June 30, 2015, an employer must stop paying for or reimbursing *individual* health insurance unless they have just one employee. After that date, ACA penalties will be incurred if health care reimbursement arrangements are continued.

- Employers having only *one employee* can continue reimbursing health care premiums

on a *pretax* basis, even past June 30, 2015. It appears that employers in this situation can still reimburse the employee’s premiums and that such reimbursement may continue to be a pretax benefit and not includible in W-2 compensation. However, the church should be alert for changes.

- Employers who have more than one employee and do not offer a bona fide group plan, but want to continue to help pay insurance costs for employees, must change the way this is done after June 30, 2015, to avoid penalties. Such can be accomplished by increasing the employee’s salary to cover health care premiums without requiring that the salary increase be used only for that purpose.



SOME TAX PROFESSIONALS
CONTEND THAT SINCE NOTICE
2015-17 WAIVED THE PENALTY
FOR NONCOMPLIANCE, AN
EMPLOYER CAN REIMBURSE
HEALTH INSURANCE PREMI-
UMS ON INDIVIDUALLY PUR-
CHASED POLICIES **PRETAX**
THROUGH JUNE 30, 2015.

- Employers do not have to file IRS Form 8928, even if they did have ACA violations in 2014.

These clarifications are extremely beneficial to churches, especially the “one employee” exemption and the waiver of the potential penalties for violating the ACA.

There are a couple of other issues raised by Notice 2015-17 that are not so clear:

- Some tax professionals contend that since Notice 2015-17 waived the penalty for noncompliance, an employer can reimburse health insurance premiums on individually purchased policies *pretax* through June 30, 2015.

- Those same tax professionals contend that employers therefore should also consider amending their 2014 payroll reports and W-2s to treat reimbursed health care insurance premiums as nontaxable.

Again, there are differing opinions on the taxability of reimbursed (or directly paid) amounts for employee's *individual* health insurance policy premiums since January 1, 2014. If the church did not treat

such payments as taxable, or amends the employee's W-2 to show that they are not taxable, the church treasurer should advise all employees that such treatment is subject to further review and clarification by the IRS and later may be determined to be taxable. Should the IRS determine that such payments are taxable, the employee could be subject to not only the tax liability but also penalties and interest on taxes not paid.

It must be remembered that a *group* health plan obtained and provided by the employer/church is not subject to the taxability and penalty discussed above.

Note: In regard to the Affordable Care Act, the Benefits Board presents current information that may change due to new guidance issued by the Internal Revenue Service and further may be subject to unique circumstances or interpretation. It is anticipated that additional guidance by the Internal Revenue Service and an upcoming decision by the U.S. Supreme Court could drastically change the information provided within this article. If so, updates will be forthcoming. ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. You may contact the Benefits Board at (423) 478-7131; toll free at (877) 478-7190; or by email at info@benefitsboard.com. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services. If such advice is desired or required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



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Drs. H. Lynn and Mary Ruth Stone

When Things Are Wrong at Home

MOST PEOPLE AGREE that when things are wrong at home—things are wrong. But four truths should be remembered:

1. It isn't the first time.
2. Every believer still has a ministry.
3. Every believer still has hope for his/her home.
4. God still has a covenant with the family

1. When things are wrong at home, things are wrong—but it is not the first time.

The very first family fresh from the creating hand of God experienced sin. How could this be? Because, “the serpent was more subtle” (Genesis 3:1).

Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden and produced two sons. By the early part of Genesis 4, their family had experienced murder—fratricide. And in their grief over the death of their second-born son, they heard their firstborn son cry out, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (v. 13).

In Genesis 9, Noah lay naked in a drunken stupor induced by too much of his

own wine. His son Ham made fun of him and sought to make his shame a mockery. Noah awoke and cursed his own son and his descendants to servitude (see Genesis 9:20-25).

In Genesis 12, Abram risked losing Sarai to Pharaoh and risked Sarai's purity at the same time. In Genesis 16, Abram and Sarai agreed to a bigamous relationship with Hagar. Jealousy ensued. Hagar fled. Later, she returned and gave birth to Ishmael.

In Genesis 21, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Abraham divorced Hagar and sent her and their son Ishmael away; consequently, a jealousy and a rivalry grew out of that bigamous and divorced family that has driven peace from both Palestine and the whole earth from that day until this.

In Genesis 19, Lot offered his daughters as the victims of mob rape, had to be dragged from sinful Sodom, experienced the death of his wife, watched Sodom burn, and in a drunken stupor impregnated his two daughters in two separate incestuous encounters.

Murder, drunkenness, indecent exposure, disrespect, fear, lying, wife-sharing, bigamy,

jealousy, divorce, abandonment, sodomy, offers of rape, death, destruction, incest, and banishment—and only the family-sins of the first 21 chapters of God's own book have been explored. Yes, when things are wrong with the family, things are wrong—but it is not the first time.

2. When things are wrong at home, things are wrong—but believers still have a ministry.

Trouble in the family fills lives with feelings of failure and inadequacy. Many have said, "How can I pretend to try to help someone else with parts of my own family in disarray?" But there is another side that must be considered as well—a more positive side.

Trouble in the family forces one's priorities to be put in order quite quickly. The mother of a successful young professional said, "I would rather my son be a ditch-digger if I knew that would keep him out of spiritual problems." Most parents know what she meant and immediately agree for their own sons and daughters.

Also, trouble in one's family gives compassion and empathy for those with similar problems. The troubled often say, "Don't tell me you know how I feel if you haven't been there." At the same time, trouble in one's own family wipes out every temptation to sit in judgment of someone else. Nothing breeds compassion for the sinner like attaching the face of one's own loved one to that sin.

3. When things are wrong at home, things are wrong—but believers still have reason to hope for their home and for their children.

Believers have reason to hope, because of the knowledge that a series of very troubled homes brought forth the Messiah—the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is enlightening to explore His scandal-ridden genealogy; for example, Rahab was a harlot. It is not by chance that five mothers are included in the genealogy in the opening chapter of the New Testament. Every mother in the record of the Christ reminds the reader of the hope extended to troubled homes. So believers should not give up on the family.

Perhaps it would be helpful to have a recipe whereby believers could predestinate their spouses and children and even the children's children. But such does not exist. Every individual is a free moral agent with a will and a choice of his or her own.

However, there is hope for the family through the Redeemer. No matter how troubled a family might be, there is hope. But unconditional, nonjudgmental love must be extended. Spouses and parents must stop denying that problems can and do exist.

All believers, but especially believing spouses, should join together in reaching out with arms of love that Paul says "never fails," and with the omnipresent arm of prayer to rescue one's own family members, as well as the families of those with whom believers work and to whom they minister.

**GOD MADE EIGHT
GREAT COVENANTS
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ENANTS ARE ESSEN-
TIALY MEANINGLESS.**

Let fathers and mothers today cover their faces like David and cry with a loud voice: "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 19:4). Let them walk and gaze with the burdened yet expectant father of the Prodigal Son, so that some day they can see their loved ones a great way off and in compassion run to them, fall on their necks, kiss them, and hear their repentant prayer.

4. When things are wrong at home, things are wrong—but God still has a covenant with the family.

Believers need to be reassured that God has always been concerned with family. That strand of "family" that began in Genesis 1:26-28 continues throughout the Old Testament and closes with the very last verse in which Malachi said: "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). The New Testament assumes the established family and gives

admonition concerning relationships within the home. Large portions of both Testaments are devoted to genealogies—family records.

Nowhere is God's love for family manifested greater than in the covenants which He made with mankind and revealed through the Scriptures. God made eight great covenants with man. Each of those covenants was dependent upon the family. Without the family, the covenants are essentially meaningless. Even the new covenant which God has established with believers today is a covenant of the family which is named after God.

Today's covenant is new because it is founded on the "more excellent ministry" of Jesus Christ. All seven of the great covenants of the Old Testament have their ultimate fulfillment in the new covenant of the New Testament. This is the meaning of the Lord's words when He gave the cup to them: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Jesus, then, is the living fulfillment of all the covenants of God. Through His redemption—His life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and present intercession—Jesus the Christ brings living reality to all of the covenants of God. God's covenant with the family is as sure as the covenant of redemption itself.

This is the hope of the family—regardless of how things have gone wrong. No wrong is beyond redemption. No sin is greater than the Cross. No transgression can defeat the blood. No lifestyle can overpower the love of God through Jesus Christ. ■

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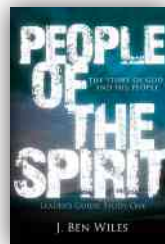
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BOOK REVIEW

Nellie Keasling



PEOPLE OF THE SPIRIT

PEOPLE OF THE SPIRIT is a study guide in two parts: (1) The student guide, and (2) the leader's guide. This is the first in a discipleship series by author J. Ben Wiles, and the Church of God Adult Discipleship has placed it under copyright.

The purpose for this series is to be a tool for small-group interaction (four to five people), along with the guidance of a facilitator. The aim is for the work of the Holy Spirit to transform and empower the student. The goal is for every member of the group to grow in Christ and discover God's personal call for his or her life. What makes this discipleship study different from others on the market today is its emphasis on the Pentecostal distinctives and the goal to see transformation take place, not just the passing along of information.

The setting can be a classroom or someone's home. The materials needed are few—chairs, whiteboard, study books, and water or coffee. The simplicity of the setting makes it nonthreatening for interaction and convenient for those who sincerely want to grow and be empowered.

The study guide is organized in a unique fashion. The six weeks of study contain

weekly material that is broken down into five daily sections. On day one is a section called "Learning the Story." Each day contains Scripture reading and questions for consideration. The daily sections also contain a final section called **Know** (knowledge); **Be** (character development); and **Do** (changing behavior).

The study guide is actually the story of God and His people from Genesis to Revelation. It is a timeline of God's people and their struggles with sin. It is also meant to address how God's people today fit into His overall plan for mankind.

The book is well written and easily understood. The questions are thought provoking and excellent for discussion and interaction. Pastors will want to encourage small adult groups within their church to take advantage of these materials.

The ISBN for the student guide is 978-1-940682-37-2 and retails for \$16.99. The ISBN for the teacher guide is 978-1-940682-36-5 and retails for \$12.99. These books may be purchased through the Church of God Adult Discipleship office by calling 1-888-766-9009 or 1-855-624-4523 or by going to the website www.coglifebuilders.com. ■



BOOK REVIEW

Rick Cottrell



STARTING OVER AGAIN

HAVING THE HEART of a pastor and the spirit of an evangelist, there is a desire to reach the hurting and to give them something that will help them on their journey with the Lord. There is no greater joy than to witness a sinner receive new birth in Christ. Many times though, that rejoicing can be short-lived. New believers can become disconnected with their newfound faith. There can be many reasons for this failure of commitment—guilt, embarrassment, and frustration—to name a few. Is there hope for them? Can they start over again? The Scripture is full of those who experienced failures and those who started over again. God started over at least once, with the exception of eight souls. When Peter asked the Lord about forgiveness, the Lord answered—“seven times seventy”—that’s 490 times that we are to forgive others. God is a giver and a forgiver—far above the abilities of a man. The issue with the backslider is not God’s forgiveness; it is man’s commitment.

Starting Over Again is dedicated to the backslider. It is a resource to put into the hand of someone who needs an easy-to-read, step-by-step handbook to help them

discover simple strategies for the Christian walk. These strategies are primary in their need, foundational in truth, simple by design, and necessary for being a disciple of Christ.

The book is also designed to be a tool for pastors to put into the hand of struggling sheep within the flock. Pastors have access to many books and pamphlets for the new believers, but the dynamics for the returning backslider are different. *Starting Over Again* will be one more resource that the pastor can utilize for moving the believer to being a disciple.

Starting Over Again is a multifaceted book. It is . . .

- A guide to help the individual on his or her personal journey of discipleship.
- A 13-chapter book that can be used as a manual for the classroom.
- A discussion primer for the small group.
- A handbook for the mentor/disciple relationship.
- An inspirational book for those struggling in their faith.

This project was born out of prayer and need in the hope that it will be a blessing to others and a benefit to the Kingdom. ■

CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

News from around the denomination between January and May 2015



Church members and special guests gather for the ribbon cutting on the first Firewall project

First Center of the 'African Firewall' Project Dedicated in Mozambique

The first of six ministry centers along the so-called "African Firewall" project was dedicated on January 17 on the outskirts of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. The center was constructed in only 48 days by several teams from Men and Women of Action in the United States and workers from the Church of God in Brazil and Mozambique.

Leaders from the Church of God in Africa and the United States joined some 200 leaders and delegates from the churches in Mozambique to dedicate the attractive, functional center, situated on spacious property that was purchased by the Church of God in Brazil.

The new building, funded largely by donations from young people in the United States and Canada, will serve as the training center for

Firewall ministries in Mozambique, as national offices for the Church of God and as a meeting place for the local congregation, which met for ten years under a tree that is still standing in front of the new structure.

Under the umbrella of World Missions and Director Tim Hill, the African Firewall project is a combined effort of several ministries of the Church of God. Men and Women of Action is a leader in the construction effort, while Youth and Discipleship adopted the initiative as the 2014 YWEA project, raising more than \$930,000 toward the effort.

Pathway Releases 2014 *MINUTES*

MINUTES 2014, the official *Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance* for the Church of God, has been released for sale by Pathway Press following an extensive update from the

75th International General Assembly held last summer in Orlando, Florida.

The *Book of MINUTES* has been regarded as the document of choice for referencing the extant rulings of the denomination of Church of God General Assemblies since the first meeting was held more than a century ago in 1906. In its over 225 pages are complete listings of church teachings, resolutions, church government outlines, and organizational charts, as well as a complete recap of the business from the agenda of the 75th International General Assembly.

The hardback version of the *MINUTES* is available exclusively at www.pathwaybookstore.com or by calling toll-free 1-800-553-8506.

Phase II of Build a City Initiative Dedicated in Cambodia

On May 4, 2015, more than 100 Church of God delegates, the Deputy Prime Minister, provincial governors, and dozens of high-ranking

government officials from the Kingdom of Cambodia, as well as humanitarian leaders joined the residents of Andong Village near Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the BUILD A CITY (BAC) initiative in Andong. The project was spearheaded by People for Care and Learning (PCL).

An estimated 4,000 people were in attendance and included a large number of residents from the community, guests from the United States, Canada, Australia, and from surrounding Southeast Asian countries.

Following the completion of the dedication ceremony, guests had the opportunity to tour the new homes, new streets, and were able to see some relatively new structures in old Andong, such as a marketplace and medical clinic.

Church of God General Overseer Mark Williams commented, "The BAC dedication event was the fulfillment of a dream that began in the hearts of people years ago—people who gave themselves to be the hearts and hands of Jesus, with the only motivation being to love God and to love people."



General Overseer Mark Williams, far left, and PCL Director Fred Garmon, third from left, are joined by Cambodian dignitaries for the Build a City Phase II dedication.

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