

Wineskins Magazine

Leadership and Change

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The Leader God Chooses

by Rubel Shelly
April, 1993

“What’s become clear to you since we last met?” Ralph Waldo Emerson used to greet friends he hadn’t seen in a while with that question. And Jesus might well have used the same greeting with Peter in [John 21:15-19](#).

Jesus had already met with Peter privately before this post-resurrection incident by the Sea of Galilee (cf. [Mark 16:7](#); [Luke 24:34](#); [1 Corinthians 15:5](#)). In their one-on-one session, Jesus appears to have restored him to his personal fellowship.

The public event of [John 21](#) was still needed, however, to confirm his place in the larger group of the apostles and to embolden him with a dramatic charge.

Peter was a wonderful fellow among the Lord’s disciples. He was bold and enthusiastic, daring and eager. When called to follow Jesus, he immediately left his fishing business and went in quest of the kingdom ([Matthew 4:18-20](#)). He is the apostle who made the wonderful confession about Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” ([Matthew 16:16](#)).

Paul would later call him a “pillar” of the Jerusalem church ([Galatians 2:9](#)), and his name appears first in all four lists of the apostles in the New Testament ([Matthew 10:2-4](#); [Mark 3:16-19](#); [Luke 6:14-16](#); [Acts 1:13](#)).

Yet it must also be said of Peter that he was a flawed man. Right on the heels of his wonderful confession of Jesus, he refused to accept what the Master said about his impending death and had to be rebuked. “Get behind me, Satan!” said Jesus. “You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” ([Matthew 16:23](#)).

When Jesus predicted the scattering of the apostles on the eve of his crucifixion, Peter arrogantly boasted. “Even if all fall away, I will not” ([Mark 14:29](#)). He denied the Lord three times that same night ([Mark 14:66-72](#)).

The best thing about Peter’s situation was that he served a loving and forgiving Savior. Thus he was not rejected because of his failure. He was not booted out of the group. He was not shamed, scolded, and spurned. Instead, he was loved, looked for, and lifted.

More than that, he was assured that a leadership role within God’s plan was still in his future.

I have watched men and women be destroyed for failures of lesser proportions. Their own guilt drove them to despair. And whatever was lacking in self-condemnation was supplied by their colleagues, friends, and community.

If we would gain insight into the heart of Jesus about leadership, several things come to mind from this episode.

What sort of person can be a leader in the Kingdom of God? People who are willing to apply whatever natural gifts or talents they have to the work of God in the world. People who make a sincere commitment to Christ. And people who rebound from their failures.

How should we view our leaders in the church? Don't expect perfection of them, for they are just as human as the rest of us. Expect them to learn from their mistakes rather than be free of mistakes. Don't use their occasions of failure as an excuse to discredit or to dismiss them, but take those times as occasions for ministering to them as Jesus ministered to Peter.

And what should this episode teach leaders about themselves? Every leader should inventory his or her life regularly and honestly about relative strengths and weaknesses; capitalize on the former and work to rise above the latter, cautious in both against failure.

When you fail (and you will!), admit it, flee to the Lord, and lay the matter before him. Let him know, to borrow Emerson's words, that something has become clear to you since the two of you last met. Reaffirm your love to the Lord. Then get back to serving him by tending, feeding, and nourishing his flock.

In the encounter between Jesus and Peter, the Lord asked the evangelist who had returned to his boats, nets, and fishing gear, "Do you truly love me more than these?" ([John 21:15b](#)). That is, are you still willing to fish for men? Are you still willing to leave the trappings of your earlier life for work with me? (Although some think "these" is a reference to the other disciples, it seems incredible that Jesus would try to elicit the sort of arrogant boast that once had been Peter's downfall. Discipleship does not demand that one compare himself to others, only that he be willing to follow Christ.)

Against the background of Peter's three denials, Jesus allowed Peter to reaffirm his commitment to him three times ([John 21:15c, 16b, 17b](#)). By making a play on the words "truly love" (*agapao*) and "love" (*phileo*), Jesus insisted that the reaffirmation be done with probing sincerity. With absolute honesty. With newfound humility.

With Peter's commitment renewed, Jesus restored him to the group and reaffirmed his confidence in him. "Feed my lambs" ([John 21:15d](#)). "Take care of my sheep" ([John 21:16c](#)). "[Feed my sheep](#)" ([John 21:17c](#)). That this imagery made an impression and stayed with Peter from that time forward is evident from his use of it in challenging other leaders at [1 Peter 5:2-4](#).

When we come to have the mind of Christ about leadership, we will understand that leading means serving, that greatness is found in humility, and that even failure can serve to make some important truths come clear for us.

In times like these, God needs leaders. Not just those who are appointed to church offices, mind you, but godly men and women who know their work in the world is fishing for men. Tending

their families as God's flock. Putting the kingdom ahead of business and personal affairs. Rising from failures to exhibit in their lives the restoring, healing, and empowering grace of God.

Go deeply into the heart of Christ, then, and you will be given the call of God to a leadership role in the kingdom which only you can fill. We hope the challenging and practical articles in this issue of *Wineskins* will contribute to your discovery of that role and help you perform it faithfully.

Leadership in Times of Change

*by Michael C. Armour
April, 1993*

Whenever I meet with church leaders of late, they want to talk about change. Over and over I hear them say, “We’ve got to do things differently.” But everyone has a horror story about some congregational blow-up in the wake of change. As a result many would-be innovators, knocked down and scarred repeatedly, are ready to quit. Others, not yet wounded, are uncertain where to start. Their leadership training never addressed the management of sustained, long-term change.

In fact, most of us are amateurs in the field of change management. We are prone to rookie mistakes. Quite often it has been our clumsy implementation of change, not change per se, which has triggered opposition and disruption. But it need not be that way. There are certain principles which, if followed closely, secure the prospect of broad-based transition which is both successful and harmonious.

To begin with, leadership must see its first priority as credibility, not change. Credibility is no automatic endowment when one becomes a leader. It must be earned and subsequently maintained. Without it, leaders will be thwarted in efforts at substantive change.

Ministers need to learn that resumes do not bestow credibility, either. It is tempting to believe that our effectiveness in the past means that people will yield to our judgment and experience. Unfortunately, they will not. Resumes only open doors so that we have an opportunity to prove ourselves afresh. In our first few months (or even years) with a new congregation, there is a weekly dialogue among the members. “He is obviously talented,” people say to themselves, “but is he credible?” Unless we are patient enough to resolve that issue in our favor, we will be powerless to influence large-scale change.

In building leadership credibility, two priorities are particularly urgent. First, we must evidence respect for the heritage of the church; and second, we must leave no doubt that God’s word is our conceptual fount. For many people their spiritual heritage is integral to their self-identity. To belittle that heritage is to attack them personally. This does not mean they are foreclosed to criticism of the past. But they rile at criticism which is sarcastic or condescending. The critic who demeans their heritage makes himself an outsider, not “one of us,” and outsiders lack credibility.

Similarly, in a fellowship where biblical authority is a central tenet, leaders impale their credibility if they appear to esteem God’s word lightly. Opponents love to discredit leadership with the charge of disregarding Scripture. That is why I have a strong preference for expository teaching and preaching. Consistent, quality exposition makes it clear that God’s word is setting our agenda. If I take a position which is controversial, but clearly drawn from the text, then those who disagree must argue with the Lord, not with me.

My experience is that our fellowship allows broad latitude to those who demonstrate unwavering respect for our heritage and who show that their starting point is Scripture. People may not concur with something I say. But I can maintain credibility in their eyes if they see that I am drawing my conviction from an honest handling of what God has said. On the other hand, if people get the notion that leadership draws its agenda from sociology, psychology, or some current fad, credibility goes out the window.

If credibility is the first priority in change management, the second is sympathetic understanding of why people oppose change. Too often we analyze resistance superficially, chalking it up to uninformed members. The solution, we think, is a series of lessons on the importance of change. When opposition continues, even after our enlightened instruction, we start muttering about head-in-the-sand traditionalists. It never dawns on us that we may have simply misdiagnosed the resistance in the first place.

People oppose change for a variety of reasons, most having little to do with theology or misinformation. I know many older adults who are well-read and progressive, but who find talk of change in the church upsetting. Not that they are strangers to change. Their generation has seen more of it than any in history. My father, who would be in his eighties if still alive, moved to Texas in a covered wagon, yet lived to see men walk on the moon. What staggering developments in a single lifetime!

Through all that change much of it terrible unsettling, today's older generation always counted on the church as a safe, stable refuge. It was their one island of predictable tranquility when everything else seemed adrift. Now, in their old age, talk of change threatens to rob them of that comfort. Should we be surprised that they become uneasy?

What these people need is not information, but assurance. They are not opposed to change as such. They simply want to know that what they have cherished over the years will not be taken from them. Once assured on that count, they can accept change – even sweeping change – in other areas of congregational life.

Which brings me to a third principle of effective change management, namely, protecting appropriate zones of stability. In every congregation there are things which, left untouched, give leadership latitude for change elsewhere. Wherever possible, leaders should “draw a circle” around those areas and isolate them from needless change. I call that a zone of stability. The more zones of stability which we maintain during times of transition, the greater the likelihood of successful change.

Let me illustrate this principle by offering an example. In our congregation certain adult Bible classes (but not all) qualify as zones of stability. Members of those classes have been together for 30 or 40 years. The class itself is what binds many of those members to the congregation. So long as their class stays intact, they have only passing concern with change elsewhere. Such classes become a zone of stability, which we are pledged not to violate.

To be sure, circumstances do not always permit us to honor that pledge. But we infringe on it only as a last resort. The same is true of other zones of stability. By carefully shielding them from change, we have broadened support for important initiatives in our overall effort at renewal.

Permit me another example. When we started LIFE groups, our elders wanted everyone in the congregation to take part. But we quickly learned that many older Christians were somewhat limited in their interest. Their 39ers organization (another zone of stability) already provided most benefits of a LIFE group. They saw no need for something else.

Had we pressured these members in LIFE groups, we would have sparked sure resistance. Instead, we simply treated the 39ers as one of our LIFE groups. We even exempted them from the curriculum that all other LIFE groups follow. The only change we asked of them was to report their attendance so we could include it in LIFE group totals.

Now when we talk publicly about LIFE groups, everyone feels included. No one fears a “put down” for having chosen 39ers over LIFE groups. Moreover, because good will prevails toward the entire enterprise, LIFE groups have great freedom to innovate. That freedom might have been abridged had we created a disgruntled remnant which was looking for something to criticize.

It is not enough, however, merely to protect zones of stability. We must also celebrate them and affirm their values. To speak condescendingly about them, or worse, to treat them like a necessary evil, is a horrific mistake. To the contrary, we must see them as constructive components in our strategy for change.

Shortly after our LIFE groups began, we discovered that Sunday night was the best time for many to meet. That meant conflict with our Sunday evening service. Because hundreds of members found the evening worship meaningful, we had made it a zone of stability. Now the choice was to infringe on that service or to impair the fledgling LIFE groups. When Sunday night LIFE groups were approved, we knew some would interpret the move as a first step in abandoning evening worship. That perception, in turn, threatened to alienate their support for the LIFE group concept altogether.

To offset the danger, we did two things to confirm appreciation for those who prefer the evening assembly. First, I personally and publicly committed to lead the Sunday night worship whenever LIFE groups were meeting. Because I had been highly vocal in promoting LIFE groups, my pledge was a substantive indicator that we would not downplay the evening worship.

Second, I poured extra effort into planning those services. I tried to build challenging, thought-provoking lessons into the hour. I wanted every participant to sense that I had made that assembly a priority in my preparation. Had we allowed the service to deteriorate into a poorly-thought-out devotional or a training period for would-be speakers, we would have sent a signal that LIFE groups (where quality is carefully sustained) were more important than the Sunday evening assembly.

The strategy, then is to counterbalance opposition to change by stroking zones of stability. Keep before people a constant reminder that not everything is in flux. What they love and treasure

most is still valued and will remain unaltered. As a general rule, the greater the change underway, the more fervently we should affirm the zones of stability.

If this begins to sound to you more like an art than a science, you are correct. There are no sure-fire formulas for success. Leaders who guide long-term change effectively seem to develop a sixth sense, an intuitive feel, if you would, as to how things should be approached. That is why constant, fervent prayer for guidance is an absolute necessity. We must continually beseech God's Spirit to form the proper instincts within us. Beyond that, we urgently need God's alliance when it comes to obstacles which humans alone cannot transcend. However much we improve as managers of change, our power to overcome will always remain finite. To neglect his partnership is thus the greatest rookie mistake of all.

Interview With Lyle Schaller

by Wineskins Staff
April, 1993

Lyle E. Schaller, editor of Abingdon's Creative Leadership Series, is one of the foremost authorities on church growth and planning. He has written a dozen books on organization in the church, including *Getting Things Done*, *Activating the Passive Church*, *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance*, *It's a Different World!*, *The Pastor and the People, Revised*, *The Senior Minister*, and *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church*, from which this biographical note is taken. Dr. Schaller is a parish consultant with the Yokefellow Institute in Richmond, Indiana. He granted this exclusive interview with *Wineskins* during a seminar he conducted for church leaders in Nashville.

WINESKINS: Can you give us a quick summary of your background of acquaintance with Churches of Christ?

SCHALLER: Well, I guess I have had three kinds of contact. First, the largest base of acquaintance has been through ministers who come to the various workshops I have conducted across the country, particularly in the Southwest and Southeast. Second, in doing workshops with churches every year, I ask normally – if it's a full-scale consultation – to talk with area churches nearby. I have visited a number of Church of Christ congregations that were a part of that schedule. And, third, there have been about five or six church consultations that I have done over the years with Church of Christ congregations.

I don't really have a deep, broad acquaintance. It is much more superficial. Of course, there are things I read. And there have been a couple of things sponsored strictly by Church of Christ ministers, where 100% of the people in the room were Church of Christ. So I guess there are these four ways by which I have come to know you.

WINESKINS: From what you know of us, what do you consider to be our greatest strength or strengths?

SCHALLER: Without any question, you have a very thought-out and very articulated belief system. So anybody who comes from the outside knows quickly where you stand and what you believe. It is not muddy; it is clear. The Church of Christ is not real narrow, narrow. It is a "religious community" and not just a fellowship. I think that would be probably number one.

Number two, you have a strong emphasis on missions. Probably number three is you have had a number of institutions tied in to the whole movement that were reinforcing a sense of identity through educational institutions.

Then the other thing you have is... And I have to be careful how to say this because, on one scale you are one of the biggest denominations in the country if you count all the denominations (1250). But if you look at where people are, you are a relatively small denomination which has

enabled you to have a degree of fellowship. People know one another within the Churches of Christ to a much greater degree than would be true in larger communions where there is a greater degree of anonymity.

WINESKINS: Turning to the negative for a moment, what are the presenting weaknesses that you see?

SCHALLER: I think by the strong emphasis on your elders and “control,” you’ve kept your churches from becoming very large. This is true because, for an elder to be an effective policy-maker while serving on a volunteer, part-time basis, you have to be small enough to be easy to comprehend. Therefore, that puts a resistance for a congregation to grow.

I would guess that you have probably 60 to 100 churches that average more than 1,000. I know of 35.

You are a theologically conservative church – which tends to produce big congregations. But what you have is this huge array of smaller and middle-sized churches and relatively few big ones. And I think this is, to a substantial degree, a product of this strong elder control. “Let’s keep it small enough so I can keep track of it in my head.”

WINESKINS: Since preachers among us do not have the kind of power that most pastors would wield in a typical denomination, how do you see our preachers – given our unique structure – helping lead our churches through the change that is going to be necessary to confront the new century?

SCHALLER: That is what is known in academic terms as a “sources-of-authority question.” When you don’t have the institutional source of authority for the preacher, as is the case in your situation, effective leadership has to rely on personal persuasion, personality, whatever you want to call it. It boils down to the personal persuasiveness of the preacher and, to a second extent, confidence.

Confidence does not necessarily produce authority, but you just sort of wiped out some of the traditional bases of authority that are in almost all other Christian communions. Therefore it is pretty much personal persuasion.

WINESKINS: How optimistic do you think our fellowship should be about being able to engage the 21st century effectively?

SCHALLER: I would not be real optimistic. Number one is that you are too organized toward smaller congregations. But people in all parts of society – whether you want to talk about universities or public high schools or medical clinics – prefer bigger institutions than the church is in position to offer.

Secondly, to some extent your identity has been lodged in who you aren’t and what you aren’t – and that is not winsome.

In other words, you draw the circle to say, “These are who we exclude,” and “These are not welcome.” And that is not going to attract people today. I think that kind of legalistic, exclusionary dimension of who we’re not and who we’re against is not going to serve you well in the twenty-first century.

WINESKINS: What areas of life to you think we need to focus most of our energy on to make the transitions that will make us more effective?

SCHALLER: Probably what you do best would be preaching and teaching. And I would say keep those at the top of the list.

I guess probably one of the things you need to do, and this overlaps the last question, would be for every one of your congregations to accept a big chunk of responsibility for helping outsiders to identify what that local congregation really is. When you say “Church of Christ,” most people do not know what you are talking about, really the majority of the people.

Your identity question has to be more and more aggressively accepted by congregations to explain to the larger community who they are, what they are. Again, not what we are not but who and what we really are.

And I would guess that one of the things that might happen – and with a lot of resistance attached to it – would be picking up names that do not include “Church of Christ” in the name of the congregation. And that is part of trying to avoid stereotypes as congregations grow into their identity. I would think that your need would be similar to the Assemblies of God and that an awful lot of the larger churches or newer churches will try to avoid being typecast by attaching that name.

The other part of your identity problem in the minds of many people is – and this isn’t completely true, I realize – that you are a sectarian group that runs from Tennessee to Texas. And that is the beginning and end of the story! I realize that doesn’t fit reality. In terms of stereotype, however, when you get out of the strip from Tennessee to Texas an awful lot of folks haven’t the faintest idea of what you are talking about when you say “Churches of Christ.” And with your historical heritage and the different divisions involved, it becomes more confusing.

Another part of the problem is – and this will vary of course from congregation to congregation in terms of your interpretation of who is eligible to be an elder – but you are excluding an awful lot of folks from being your elders by a very legalistic interpretation of what Paul wrote. Can you have a non-believer in your home? Must you have multiple children? If your youngest child is not old enough to be baptized, are you not eligible to be an elder?

So, in a sense, you say that you are reserving the position of elder for older people. You are cutting off openings for your younger, brighter folks coming along who are in touch with the culture and who are very gifted, able people....

WINESKINS: Given these lay elder leaders, what sort of counsel do they need to hear in order to free up some of the more creative energy, both from preachers and younger members, that will allow change to happen?

SCHALLER: Number one, I think, is to see whether the role of elders is permission-withholding or permission-giving. And in your tradition – this is true with Presbyterians and some others – the traditional interpretation of an elder is somebody withholding permission. And that strikes with creativity.

Your operational definition of an elder is a permission-withholding position. In other words, when I become an elder I can tell people what they cannot do. And a lot of folks say, “Well, it’s simpler to go somewhere else.

I think probably the biggest risk you have is some of your most committed, gifted, younger people aren’t going to stay with that system. I am talking about the 26 year olds and the 31 year olds who, say in 10 years – they say 10 years is a lifetime – see they have enough other options....

WINESKINS: How can those who want to make positive changes within the existing entity make that change more palatable to the larger membership?

SCHALLER: Because of your polity, you probably can pretty much do it by congregation. And that goes back to what was raised earlier. It is a long-term, very persuasive minister who builds the power to initiate and see changes through on the basis of the combination of tenure, confidence, and personality.

Stepping Down to Lead

*by John Harris
April, 1993*

Somebody needs to lead. How is it done without it going to the leader's head? How can one have the power to get things done and not be corrupted by it? Should I ever lead or hold power? Can anyone be trusted with power?

Nelson Andrews defines leadership as causing things to happen through others. That's as good a definition of leadership as one is likely to find. But any way you slice it, that's power.

Power of Subtle Control

It's tempting enough if you are able to cause things to happen by force. But if you are subtle enough to cause them to happen by persuasion and subtle reward, your power is even greater. Greater because most people, even highly intelligent, informed ones, can be flattered, persuaded, and rewarded into doing the will of an effective leader, often without clear consciousness of what's causing their behavior.

A story about the manipulation of a psychology professor through positive reinforcement illustrates the power of this subtle approach. The prof habitually sat on the front of a desk in his class on human learning. He enjoyed students' comments and questions. The students decided they would modify his behavior for the fun of it. By agreement, they would not comment or ask questions while he sat in his favorite place. But when he sat in the chair behind the desk, they'd comment and question.

By the end of the course, he was sitting behind the desk in the chair all the time. They asked him if he was aware of this change. He wasn't until they pointed it out. They asked if he knew why he had moved behind the desk into the chair. He didn't know until they explained what they had done. He laughed and complimented the students on their use of some of the techniques he was teaching.

If the behavior of a professor teaching applied behavioral psychology can be altered without his being aware of what's happening, what about most of us? A switch from coercion by the stick to manipulation by the carrot only makes power less painful. It actually increases power because of its subtlety.

How then does one use the power of leadership (causing things to happen through others) for the good? The ultimate example is Jesus. Paul wrote the Christians in Philippi that they should adopt the mental attitude of Jesus. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place..." (Philippians 2:5-9a).

Motives

The “natural man” is inclined to use all his resources – money, sexual desire, and power – for selfish ends. Therefore, natural man with the power of leadership is potentially dangerous to himself and those around him. Nevertheless, we seem bent on increasing leadership skills without due regard for the attitudes and values of the leader.

Jesus demonstrated self-emptying before exaltation. It is also striking that Jesus told Nicodemus about being born again rather than the Samaritan woman. Nicodemus was probably one of the best men Jesus met; certainly, he was religious, with status, power, and money. He was the epitome of the good churchman. The Samaritan woman was living with her sixth man to whom she was not married. Why tell the churchman Nicodemus about the second birth? Surely the Samaritan woman, the adulteress, needed it most! No, Nicodemus the righteous and affluent leader was probably most tempted to be led by his own confidence and pride.

Pride may be the hardest inclination in natural man to subdue. It often persists after lust and acquisitiveness are under control. Nevertheless, for those who would lead like Jesus, it must be radically redirected.

James and John

Pride and ambition drove James and John. They were fiercely loyal to Jesus and dedicated to sharing in his triumphal rule. When a Samaritan village would not receive Jesus, they wanted it burned.

James, John, and their mother were eager for the two of them to be Jesus’ chief lieutenants. Seeing the division this caused among his followers, Jesus stopped to teach about servant leadership. (See Matthew 20:25-28.)

On another occasion when the disciples argued about who would be the most important, Jesus placed a child by his side. He clearly indicated that child-like humility and innocence were the premium qualities. “For he who is least among you – he is the greatest” (Luke 9:48).

Despite this teaching, ambitious John on one occasion complained that others are casting out demons in Jesus’ name. John apparently wanted to protect the franchise. Jesus made it clear that he was not interested in credit but achievement. “Do not stop him for whoever is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:50). One suspects Jesus must have felt, “We could get a lot done around here if we did not care who gets the credit!”

Majors and Minors

One of the last object lessons Jesus taught his disciples before his death was that of washing their feet. This was the work of the lowest servant in the house. Perhaps Jesus knew pride and ambition would be the most divisive and destructive elements in the faith community. When he finished, he said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you

the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:15-17).

Christians have often majored in minors. All too often most of our energy and time is spent on correct details of worship, doctrine, and organization rather than a deep, radical reprogramming of our affections. The Pharisees did this with disastrous consequences. How clever they were at keeping the law in external details while neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness. One cannot focus on these majors with an unbroken heart.

Churchmen today like the ancient Pharisees often follow their pride and ambition. While leaving our sinful core untouched, we try vainly to compensate by scoring on the externals. Note what Jesus said about the Pharisees’ pride:

- Everything they do is done for men to see....”
- “...they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.”
- “they love to be greeted in the market place and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’”

In contrast, Jesus describes the way his people should act:

- *But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.*”
- “The greatest among you will be **your servant.**”
- “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and **whoever humbles himself will be exalted**” (Matthew 23:5-12).

Leaders You Can Trust

The ideal Christian organization and leader have the following characteristics:

- Followers who have lost their natural inclinations, including pride and ambition, in a new, common identity, the mind of Christ.
- Leaders who have emptied themselves of pride and ambition and taken the role of servant. With such characteristics, the power of leadership is good. The ideal Christian leader has stepped down from status and position because he has found a new source of pride and a new ambition. He and his followers have been born again. While appearing to step down, they have stepped up from love of self to all-consuming love of God and others.

Just a Little Bit Smaller Than God

by Jim Martin
April, 1993

Recently Jamie, our six year old, came home from her morning kindergarten. She was ecstatic, dancing around the kitchen floor as she described the special visitor at her school. "He is the tallest man in the world and weighs 4,001 pounds! His hands were giant." Hearing this description, I tried to envision the guest who spoke to the children in the gym that morning. Was he an NFL linebacker? Perhaps a quiet morning spent with a Japanese sumo wrestler? She tried to describe the man but seemed frustrated at not being able to pinpoint his height. Finally she said, "Dad, he was just a little bit smaller than God!" Later, I learned that the visitor was Haji Mohammed Alam Channa from Pakistan. At seven feet, eight inches, he is the tallest living man in the world. He has the distinction of wearing size 22 shoes and weighing 401 pounds.

Afterward, I thought about her description, "Just a little bit smaller than God." In the mind of this child, God was the all-encompassing standard by which to measure the indescribable. She was correct. The transcendent Holy God is our standard, our rule, our ideal. Many Christian leaders began serving out of love and a sense of a genuine call from God. Perhaps they envisioned making a significant difference in their congregations. They were determined to keep their priorities straight. Yet months or years later these same spiritual leaders may find themselves drained by the reality of the way things seem to be.

Perhaps an elder becomes discouraged because shepherding has become more of a burden than a delight. These are times when he feels like he is doing anything but shepherding people. Most of his time seems to be spent putting out fires. Some members grumble due to too much change and another group grumbles because change seems to be happening too slowly. Meanwhile, problem after problem is brought to the attention of the elders. Talk of budgets, overflowing toilets, and complaints from various members begin to devour more precious time and energy. Eugene Peterson, in his penetrating and convicting book, *Working the Angles* (p. 1), speaks of Christian leaders who are really shopkeepers rather than spiritual leaders and ministers. How do spiritual leaders function in an atmosphere where the agenda seems to be institutional maintenance, policy making, and keeping the customers (members) happy? These persons may find themselves primarily recruiting workers, entertaining members, and maintaining church programs. Prayer, scripture reading, and reflection on the character of God seem to be a luxury. In some church meetings, if the Bible is read or if the leaders pray intently for a period of time it almost seems to be an interruption that is indulged until we can get back to "business."

At the same congregation a minister comes home from an elders and ministers meeting. Another demoralizing, disheartening meeting. No doubt few if any who were present realized just how discouraging the evening was for this minister. There was no major turmoil, no accusations, or political maneuvering. His frustration, however, concerns the time and energy spent discussing the institutional aspects of the church and how little time was spent on the central business of the Father. The meetings are not satisfying to him, the other ministers, or the elders. He makes every effort to stay alive spiritually and yet feels deflated after an evening in a leadership meeting.

These are challenging and difficult times for Christian leaders. In the midst of this, many leaders are experiencing soul starvation. Will our elders, ministers, and other key leaders experience the ongoing spiritual nourishment needed to survive? Unless Christian leaders are experiencing personal spiritual renewal it will be very difficult for them to lead God's people into congregational renewal. If one sees the church simply as an institution which needs to be overhauled or at least given a tune-up, one might see renewal as basically the implementation of new ideas and new methodology. Yet, genuine Spirit-led renewal must begin in the hearts and minds of the leaders both personally and collectively.

I. Why is Spiritual Nourishment Important?

First, spiritual nourishment is important because the very nature of spiritual leadership presupposes that there is some semblance of spiritual maturity in the leaders and that they continue to grow in Christ. The nature of spiritual leadership demands that the leader has a clear vision of leadership priorities. Most leaders are constantly being challenged to place the urgent over the important. Consequently, there may be long arid spells where no attention is given to spiritual devotion. After all, spiritual leaders are acutely aware that the church sees the public self and not the private self. With so many responsibilities, the temptation is to ignore the private spiritual life and to concentrate on getting the public acts accomplished.

Second, spiritual nourishment is crucial because enthusiasm for ministry can diminish due to discouragement, disappointment, and criticism.

Finally, spiritual nourishment is important because Christian leaders can lose their compassion and love for a broken, lost world. Some become numb after dealing with the constant bombardment of one human tragedy after another.

Without spiritual nourishment, the soul can become parched and empty of life. The result may be moral slippage or a loss of courage in the face of opposition. The consequences can even be fatal as one may be eaten alive by the soul-eating cancers of cynicism, pessimism, and faithlessness.

II. How Can Leaders Nourish Their Spiritual Lives?

First, a growing spiritual life is built by regularly practicing the spiritual disciplines. Special attention must be given to prayer. Prayer that consists of praise, confession, petition, and thanksgiving enables one to drink deep from spiritual wells. Praise and petition deepen the care and counsel that we give to those whom God brings our way. Christian leaders need to confess their sins to God both individually and as a group. Imagine the encouragement of seeing Christian leaders lead the way in publicly confessing their own sins to the holy God.

Second, the cultivation of worship enables one to avoid the spiritual bankruptcy that so many have experienced. What can cleanse and fortify a human being more than the worship of the transcendent God which lifts one above his or her problems? Through prayer, hearing the word of God, and the Lord's Supper there is genuine nourishment.

Third, spiritual nourishment comes through reading Scripture. It is amazing that Christian leaders can meet together week after week and month after month and never open a Bible! Why not read a book of the Bible together? Why not read together the story of Jesus? At the same time, these leaders could pray for open eyes and sensitive hearts to see their own cities through the eyes of Jesus.. Besides the Bible, Christian biographies and quality devotional works can be very helpful. (See Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants*.)

Christian leaders also need to know themselves. Some know the congregation and even the community far better than they know themselves. Who is this person called a leader? What is his view of self? Some leaders seem unaware of strong emotions and behavior patterns which influence their behavior as a leader. The leader who has been deeply hurt in formative years may spend many years reacting out of that hurt. Consequently, people may find that he seems aloof, close minded, angry, or defensive. Other leaders may wrestle with the craving for everyone's approval. These persons may have been reared in a critical, negative environment where they were never able to measure up to impossible demands. These people never received a "well done" from the significant people in their lives. Consequently they appear indecisive as they try to somehow make everyone happy. These leaders may ignore problems or procrastinate to avoid the frightful task of making decisions that could displease some in the church.

Finally, ministers and elders must commit themselves to make the leadership environment an arena of strength and encouragement. Leadership meetings which tend to be accusatory, devaluing, or even passive take a spiritual and emotional toll on Christian leaders. Such an atmosphere spills over into the church as well. If God's leaders cannot rise above lethargy, passiveness, and pettiness, how can the rest of the church be expected to do so? Elders and ministers must commit themselves to developing the kind of leadership atmosphere which is godly and affirming. Leaders must learn to take care of one another. Leaders must commit themselves to give emotional and spiritual support to one another. (If you do not know how to be supportive to your ministers or elders, ask!) In order for leaders to nurture their spiritual lives they must know God, know themselves and have an absolute commitment to encouraging their fellow leaders.

Perhaps Henri Nouwen said it best concerning the priorities of the spiritual leader. "The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus? Perhaps another way of putting the question would be: Do you know the incarnate God? In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, that cares, that reaches out and wants to heal. In that heart there is no suspicion, no vindictiveness, no resentment, and not a tinge of hatred. It is a heart that wants only to give love and receive love in response" (Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, p. 24).

Cheers: A Minister's Fantasy Ending

by Mike Cope
April, 1993

When I visited Boston last year, there was enough time for only rushed visits to the essential stops: Walden Pond, the Freedom Trail, Fenway, the battle sites, Harvard, and (of course) Cheers. It's the only bar I've ever had my picture made in front of. (Such poses are discouraged in seminary.)

But somehow I felt like I knew the people inside—that I should be able to walk in and see Coach or Woody, Diane or Rebekah, Sam, Norm, Cliff, Frazier, Lilith, and Carla. For eleven years they've entered American homes with the inviting theme song asking, "Wouldn't you like to get away?"

In many ways Cheers is a place many would like to get away to. In a recent column, Bob Greene tells of being in an airport corridor in Kansas City:

I heard the sound of laughter.... The laughter was coming from what seemed to be a bar/restaurant. I had a few minutes until my flight, so I went inside. The person laughing was a customer. He was talking to what seemed to be two men sitting at the bar with their backs toward me.

As I walked further, it became apparent that the two men being talked to by the customer were not humans. They were robots. Robots sitting at a bar—robots constructed and dressed to resemble characters from the television series "Cheers... This bar looked just like the bar in "Cheers." The man who was talking to the robots seemed to be having a swell time. I asked him why he had come in. "I don't know," he said, a smile on his face. "It just reminded me of home."

And because "Cheers" is like the home many people would like to have, there are similar life-like bars in St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, Anchorage, and Christchurch, New Zealand.

But the time has come for the award-winning series to end. The original set will be moved to the Smithsonian.

My fantasy is that NBC comes back in mid-summer with one last episode in which Jesus Christ walks down the familiar stairs, strolls through the door, and has a seat on the barstool adjacent to Norm. (Keep in mind, this is one minister's fantasy. The chances of this being the writers' selection for the final episode are rather, um, slim.)

I can't help but wonder: What would he say to Norm? First, I think he might commend him for his fierce loyalty. Even though Norm is a willing accomplice, if not organizer, to any prank, he is still a loyal friend. Perhaps Jesus would tell him about some of his friends—people who often seemed clueless as to what his real mission was—their experiences together.

Second, I think Jesus might commend Norm for his sense of humor. Everyone is funny at cheers: Sam for his one-track mind, Carla for her barracuda barbs, Cliff for his mastery of trivial pursuit, and Woody and Coach for their kindergarten minds. But Norm is the clown, the master of one-liners.

“Norm, what’s going down?” “My buns on this barstool—pass me a beer.”

“Hey Norm, what are you up to?” “My perfect weight if I was eleven feet tall.”

“Norm, how’s the world treating you?” “Like a baby treats its diaper. Where are the beer nuts?”

“What do you say to a cold one, Norm?” “It’s a dog-eat-dog world and I’m wearing milkbone underwear. Toss me a beer.”

Jesus could appreciate this sense of humor, I think. After all, he threw in a line now and then that would have made people chuckle.

But maybe he’d ask Norm what lies behind his humor. Some people—Bill Cosby and Jerry Seinfeld come to mind—just are funny. But others use humor to cover deep reservoirs of pain: the cut-up in class who’s been stung by his parents’ divorce; the office clown who’s dying inside; the “life of the party” who’s thought many times about suicide.

This is where (in my script) Jesus would tell Norm he seems to be running from something. It could be from his marriage to Vera or from his job where he’s always having to be bossed and belittled (when he’s employed). Or maybe he’s running from a world where the ideal man is thin and fit, while Norm is, well, “proportionally challenged.” Perhaps this is why he keeps escaping to his barstool, his beer, and his buddies, to a place where “everybody knows your name, and they’re always glad you came.” Cheers is a place where you can be a failure and it’s all right.

And there are two messages I think Jesus would have for Norm (and the others). The first is that God accepts you just as you are. Your body may not be proportioned right, your marriage may be in shambles, you may be confused about your sexual identity, you may be guilty of unconscionable sins. But God desperately loves you. God doesn’t measure people with the same standards that society uses. Jesus might explain that the very reason he came was because God is eager to receive people who are “failures” in one or more areas of their lives.

The second message would be that your life can have a purpose. There’s more to life than downing a mug of beer and a bowl of beer nuts. God wants to place you with another group where they can know your name and always be glad you came. This group of dreamers is formed around the belief that they are continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ—a ministry that taps into the eternal desires of God.

My episode would end with two sentences on the screen:

“If you are Norm, keep an eye out for Jesus Christ.”

“If you know Jesus Christ, keep an eye out for Norm.”

Book Review: Evangelism Through the Local Church

by Randy Fenter
April, 1993

O.K., so this is not a book you're going to casually pick up. First, any tome the size of *War and Peace* will look impressive on the shelf but should always sport a heavy-duty dust jacket. It will be needed. Second, talking about evangelism scares us only slightly less than doing it. Emphasize slightly. And, third, any book with the subtitle, "A comprehensive guide to all aspects of evangelism," has an editor who really wanted to be a seminary professor in the first place. Obviously this is not a book you're going to read ... unless you happen to stumble into someone who has. Then you'd better know a good massage therapist because your arm is going to be twisted and your ear bent.

Michael Green knows what comes to your mind when you hear the word evangelism: "strident, perspiring preachers, smooth-talking televangelists or strange characters at street corners urging the passersby to repent and meet their God." And he knows that you don't want to read this book. "In a word, evangelism seems something no self-respecting person would want to be involved in. It has overtones of manipulation. In a permissive age it smacks of wanting to change the way another person is. And that is an insult. It is unacceptable."

So why shouldn't we let such unattractive, sleeping dogs lie? Because we cannot help but "reflect on the godlessness, materialism, and selfishness that are becoming more and more rampant throughout society." Because "evangelism is not an optional extra for those who like that sort of thing. It is a major part of the obedience of the whole church to the command of its Lord.... It is hard to see how we can realistically acknowledge Him as Lord if we take no notice of what He tells us to do."

After deleting some common but ill-tempered views of evangelism, Green reminds us of the beauty of this lifestyle, one that "is so full of joy about Jesus Christ that it overflows as surely as a bathtub that is filled to overflowing with water." He is not satisfied with "eliciting decisions for Christ [or] getting hands raised." Instead, "true evangelism issues in discipleship.... And evangelism that is truly evangelism issues in a life that is changed from going my way to going Christ's way." Such evangelism "means incorporation into the church, the body of Christ.... A Christianity that does not begin with the individual does not begin: but a Christianity that ends with the individual ends."

Green is a rare bird: a theologian who talks theology without you knowing it (he never mentions soteriology; he asks, "What is man?" "What is salvation?", "What is conversion?", and "What is baptism?") a professor who regularly leads people to Jesus, and a scholar who enjoys interfacing with modern culture. His description of evangelistic preaching beautifully describes his book: "[It is] crisp; it wastes no words. It is interesting; it grabs attention from the opening sentence and maintains it throughout. It is biblical; Scripture has a power our words do not. It is relevant to the needs of the hearers, and it is immediately perceived to be so. And it challenges people to decision."

Evangelism Through the Local Church is divided into four sections (but you'll find yourself profitably skimming subheadings).

“Part One: Issues for the Church” clarifies our view of the church's mission and rejoices in God's incredible plan to answer our common needs. Addressing our reluctance to speak in a pluralistic culture (with our “awareness of the need for world citizenship, of the search for what unites us rather than divides”), Green honestly addresses questions which many secretly believe but are afraid to ask out loud: “‘There's truth in every religion. Why not leave people alone?’ ‘All religions are relative,’ ‘Truth has many forms,’ and ‘People should be left with the religious truth in which they have been raised. Why should they be disturbed?’”

He challenges us to think through “What becomes of those who have never heard the gospel?” and “Will nonbelievers be judged by their deeds?” He candidly addresses our universal desire for universalism to be true. Like any good book, *Evangelism through the Local Church* will stretch your thinking, raise new questions and provide multiple “Ah ha” moments.

In challenging us to be passionate about Jesus in a multi-faith society, Green paints a balanced picture of Islam. He says that while some Christians want to imagine that Christianity and Islam are much the same thing, “try persuading the Arab states or Nigeria or Pakistan of that proposition. Any trace of syncretism would be repudiated far more passionately by the followers of Muhammad than by most zealous and informed Christians.” Noting that there are more Muslims in Britain than Methodists and Baptists combined, Green affirms “Christianity and Islam are fundamentally and irreconcilably different. Islam is in no doubt about the propriety of its missionary work in a multi-faith society. Nor should Christians be.”

Perhaps closer to home for many American readers is the New Age movement, “the most modern and most comprehensive, joyous, and eclectic of all attempts at syncretism.” Why is it so popular? “It speaks to the hunger of mankind for unity in a desperately dangerous world. It speaks to the heart that has been reared on the values of materialism and realizes that they are totally inadequate to live by. It speaks to important modern issues that Christians have been slow to address; the environment, various kinds of oppression, and the sterility of the technological society. It offers a spiritual dimension to life that is free of dogma, diverse in manifestation, full of celebration and “fun” things, undemanding in life-style, and emancipated from the claims of morality. That is a very powerful mix. It offers hope in a time of hopelessness, countering prophets of doom with the message of human potential and social transformation. And the biggest and reddest cherry on the top of the cake is this: self-deification. The primal sin has become the ultimate truth. I am divine. I can do what I like.”

“Part Two: The Secular Challenge” rewards as it comes to grips with the secular mind including monism, humanism, narcissism, agnosticism, and pragmatism. For instance, in confronting New Age thinking, Green suggests that “first, we should rejoice in its recognition of spiritual values after decades of barren materialism. Second, we should make friends with members of the New Age movement, go to their bookshops and foodshops and get to know them.” As an active evangelist who rubs shoulders with other evangelists, Green peppers his book with real life stories. “One of my friends goes to [New Age] meetings regularly and has been asked to read pieces from the Bible each week on the topic chosen for the evening. These

readings make a lot of impact. There is an openness, and we need to take advantage of it.” I find myself agreeing with Green: “A movement like the New Age movement is a judgment on the Western church for its rationalism and deadness. We are so weak on the transcendent; they are not. We are so feeble and dull in worship; they are not. I believe we will get nowhere with such people by argument. They are devotees of experience. And we have to show that in Christianity there is an experience just as dynamic but far more credible and reasonable.”

In confronting the secular challenge, Green is not afraid to deal with the inevitable questions: “Does God exist and how do you know?” “In today’s world, how can you believe in miracles, any miracles, but particularly, how can you base your life on the belief that a man came back from the dead?” “How can there be suffering and evil in a world created by a good and loving God?” And finally, “How can we—how dare we—make claims of ultimacy for Jesus Christ in a highly pluralistic world?”

In this secular age intellectual problems float on top of emotional turmoil. “Most people are not moved by reason alone, perhaps not by reason primarily. There are powerful nontheological factors that we ignore at our peril..., and this is especially the case in our own day when nonlinear thinking has robbed logic of a lot of its effectiveness. People are more touched by atmosphere, love, welcome, surprise—rather than argument.” Green tells of a “senior woman, who [is a] charming, well-educated humanist teaching biology at [the] doctoral level in a university, who came out with nonsense comments about Christianity: The Gospels were written hundred of years after the event,’ ‘All religions are the same,’ and so forth. Those were the rationalizations of the head.. The reasons of the heart also began to emerge, and they were the real things. There had been desperate hurt in childhood: her mother had died of cancer, untreated, because she was a Christian Scientist and was taught to believe the pain was unreal. That left great bitterness... If we neglect the reasons of the heart, we shall never help people into the kingdom of God. We shall certainly never succeed in introducing them to the kingdom by argument alone.”

Part Three: Church-Based Evangelism” is remarkably practical, with a powerful call to special occasion evangelistic preaching and a detailed description of “Discovery Groups,” an effective small group ministry to those who respond with interest to the preaching. This section is not just for preachers or the clergy, however. “Most churches give only the most limited scope and responsibility to lay members. This is disastrous. It not only creates a two-class society, but it gives the impression that the... minister knows it all, and the layman is an amateur. Nothing could be further from the truth. In many ways the laity know far more about life, about celebration and friendship, about natural contacts with their friends than the clergy do.” Evangelism must be church-based, not minister-based. This section ends with the reminder that evangelism is not a matter of human effort; we are privileged to share in God’s work.

The book concludes with a number of practical appendixes including “Setting Up Discovery Groups,” “A Course for Inquirers,” “Leading a House Meeting,” “Drama and Movement in Evangelism,” “Leading Worship in Evangelism,” and “Social Justice and Evangelism.” Additionally, each chapter concludes with a considerable bibliography for further reading.

Green remembers a cartoon from the time of the 1960 Olympics which showed the celebrated runner from Marathon arriving in Athens and falling exhausted on the ground while he mumbles with a blank look on his face, "I have forgotten the message." *Evangelism Through the Local Church* reminds us all of the message, and that his name is Jesus. It is equally a reminder of the joy of telling others the "good news." "There is no joy on earth to compare with that of leading a friend to Christ. If only church people who are so timid and cautious about it could be persuaded of that, nothing could keep them silent. God's gagged people would become His confident people." *Evangelism Through the Local Church* is a joyful argument for removing the gag.

Faces of the Future

*by Billie Silvey
April, 1993*

Los Angeles has been called the city of the future, and with good reason. Our TV and movie producers strike images that spread like wildfire. Our fads and fashions are soon seen from Seattle to Birmingham, from San Diego to Boston. When multiculturalism became the catchword, and LA became the capital of the Pacific Rim, city after city braced for diversity.

Today, a year after the explosion of the LA riots, what lessons does this bellwether of the future have for the rest of the nation? Maybe none. Maybe we handled things so badly we no longer have anything to say. But maybe, out of our pain and fears and sprouting hope, we can offer caution—and encouragement.

Especially as Christians, we should have something positive to contribute from our experiences. As friends of mine—black, white, Hispanic and Asian—have talked, wept, celebrated and prayed over our city, we may have learned a few things.

1) We have to get along. Rodney King's question has sparked endless speculation about race relations. Can we all get along despite our differences? Increasingly, we inhabit the same neighborhoods, compete for the same colleges and jobs, serve each other in business and the church. In a constantly shrinking world, we're bound to bump into each other, and we must find ways to cushion the blow.

In the past, we thought sitting in the same church buildings, classrooms, and offices would show us that we aren't really different. But we are. Different cultures have different values, different ways of relating and different ways of looking at the world. We've got to learn, not just to understand those differences, but to make room for those who hold them—on all levels of our society.

According to Manning Marable, researcher at the University of Colorado's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race in America, improving race relations is "no longer just a matter of bringing members of a black church to a white church for a Sunday picnic.... Unequal power, unequal ownership and unequal privilege—that is the root of the conflict we see in the streets."

How many black elders do you have? Hispanic deacons? Asians serving the Lord's Supper? Are there just token minority members on your preaching and teaching staffs?

Do we only include blacks who act like whites or Hispanics who speak English? How many of us are bilingual?

Twice a year, the Vermont Avenue church has an all-day Bible camp for neighborhood children. Each class has an English-speaking and a Spanish-speaking teacher. But even then we must be careful not to teach in English and just have the Spanish teachers translate.

2) The poor aren't like the rest of us. The LA riots weren't just about race, they were about economics. Last year, some 15.7% of Californians lived in poverty, and homelessness increased by as much as 16%. It's easy to see the poor and homeless through middle-class eyes, to assume that, if they weren't so lazy or if they'd just clean themselves up, they could do better.

But the poor don't think like we do. Those of us with houses and cars and jobs and educations feel pretty much in control of our destinies. If we aren't lazy and clean ourselves up—maybe go back to school for a couple of classes—we probably will get a job.

As former President Jimmy Carter says, “The rich are those who believe that if they make a decision, it will make a difference in their lives.”

The poor feel much less in control. Buffeted by forces they don't understand, they feel hopeless and helpless against their fate. This fatalism was hard for me to comprehend until my husband was unemployed for five months. As our bank account dwindled, I felt my sense of control slipping.

Yet often the poor are more generous than the rest of us. Recently when we were feeding the homeless downtown, I worried that a fight might erupt over a sturdy pair of men's shoes. Sure enough, two men grabbed for them at once. I glanced down at their feet. Both had on good shoes.

“I'd rather give them to somebody who really needs them,” I said, and they stepped back and pushed another man forward. His tattered tennis shoes were barely held together with broken shoestrings.

These desperate men who had their hands on something of value gave it up to someone who needed it more. Would we do the same?

3) The more we need education, the less there seems to be. Even though California hasn't sunk into the sea, our education system seems to have. Once the envy of the nation, our schools are struggling. Having been asked to take a 12% pay cut, LA teachers are threatening to strike.

With more than 40% of students having limited proficiency in English, we need to put more, not less, into good schools and teachers. Today's students are tomorrow's work force. If we're to be competitive in a global economy, they must be well trained.

4) It's hard to touch when you live on an island. Despite the fact that the world is shrinking, it's easier to avoid people than ever before.

As LA City Councilman Mike Hernandez points out, “People... can get in their BMWs in Westwood, drive to an underground parking garage downtown, work all day on the 22nd floor and not understand what's happening—why streets in some parts of town are dirtier, why schools are overcrowded. People still don't understand what happened in the riots.”

We need to understand. We need to step off our islands of comfort and isolation and reach out to people we might otherwise never see. We need to share power, resources, knowledge—ourselves, with those different from us.

The angels at the birth of Christ sang of “Peace on earth, good will to men.” The Apostle Paul was committed to promoting unity among the diverse ethnic groups in the early church. That wouldn’t be a bad mission for us.

Racial inequality, poverty, ignorance, and isolation are rampant in LA. They may spread to other parts of the country as well, unless we begin now to reverse the trends, to change the face of the future.

Hope Network Newsletter: The “Why” of New Songs

by Jack Pape
April, 1993

This is the third and final part of this series on music. The first was on variety in form and idiom in music; the second was a history of special music. This article by Jack Pape, a preacher from Colorado Springs, brings new thinking on when our hearts overflow so much that the old songs are not enough. Jack, a godly man who is always stretching the wineskins, deals thoroughly with the text. I know you'll be blessed.

-Lynn Anderson, feature editor

In many places where we worship today we hear “new songs”—contemporary music. Most of these are so new they haven't found their way into hymnals yet, not even into song sheets. Quite often they are so new that they must be projected on our overhead transparencies and learned while they are sung. They sound fresh, new, helpful to some people. To others, they are disconcerting “camp songs” for “change's sake.” Psalm 40 challenges us to rethink new music. As we search for new songs today, this psalm hits us right on the overhead transparency. What kind of help does the Scripture give in understanding this question?

Why Sing?

The writer of Psalm 40 puts his problem on the table with only half a line, “I waited patiently for Yahweh.” That is it. Actually the Hebrew repeats itself to express the writer's intense pain. “Hopefully I hoped in Yahweh.” Things looked bleak but this poet waited for Yahweh to renew him.

He did not wait in vain. Rescue and refreshment finally came: “He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.” Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.” Several things indicate that the writer's trouble was severe sickness. The “miry pit” or “slimy bog” probably refers to the underworld as does the “mud and the mire” in verse 2. For the Jew, death took a person to the pit. Psalm 69:14 described death as mire: “Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink.” Job 33:30 sees death as a pit of darkness, “turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.” Psalm 30:3 praises God for deliverance from the grave, “O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.” Old Testament writers frequently associate “the pit” with death. But God has delivered this singer in Psalm 40 who expected to die. Likely the disease almost did him in, but God spared his life.

“He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.” In other words, “I almost slipped into the pit of death, but God gave me health so that my life is now on a solid rock.” The psalmist is so overjoyed that he cannot express himself without a new song: “he put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.” This new song signifies a new orientation. Old songs can't express the singer's new feelings. God's rescue inspires a new song.

New Wineskins

Renewal which breaks forth in a new song is a common theme for God's people in both Testaments. When God rescued Israel from Egypt, old songs, like old wineskins, could not contain the new energy. So Moses and Miriam sang a new song (Exodus 15). God's special mercy to Mary prompted a new song: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). New songs are the new rejoicing of the spirit.

Someone asked me, "Why do we need new songs? What is wrong with the old songs?" There is nothing wrong with the old songs. But whenever there is renewal in people's lives, there will be new songs just as new wine requires new wineskins. The same can be said for the church. Wherever there is renewal of our life in God, the church will sing new songs. That is why the book of Revelation says, "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'" (Revelation 5:9). And again, "They sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders" (Revelation 14:3).

New Every Morning

New songs are needed continually because God's mercy is new every morning: "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall....My soul is downcast within me. Yet... I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fails. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:19-23).

The first thing which results from God's new deliverance is a new song and the second is a new evangelism. Now: "Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40:3). There is not much evangelistic fervor among us today, but new experiences of God in our lives generate new songs and renewed fervor so that "many...see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

Newness In Daily Life

But let us not be distracted by "really big" examples of God's deliverance. Newness of God also breaks through in the daily lives of common believers.

Verse 4 says that new help and a new song are possible for anyone: "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods."

According to verse 5, the kind of renewal which calls for a new song is not an isolated event but the common experience of those who pray and wait: "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare." God did not play favorites with this singer. God's soul-stirring blessings are for all people. "He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted" (Job 5:9). "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

New Obedience

This new deliverance and new song produce a new obedient heart: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced;... Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’” (Psalm 40:6-8). The writer of Hebrews applied this verse to Christ: “Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7).

The old world of spiritual fatigue produces only dead ritual. But with a new song God wants renewed worship and willing hearts which say, “I desire to do your will.” He wants a new way to look at law: “O my God; your law is within my heart.”

The new life is not one of lawlessness, not at all. Rather the new life is utterly new because God’s law is obeyed with utter delight!

New Proclamation

By the end of Psalm 40, the poet has a new willingness to go public. He declares this new, bold, public testimony aloud: “I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly” (Psalm 40:9-10).

This pledge to public proclamation is a high point of this psalm which the chiasm structure underscores. In Hebrew literature the chiasm structure uses four lines to form a literary “X” placing parallel statements in positions 1 and 4, and in positions 2 and 3.

This chiasm is (1) “I proclaim,” (2) “I do not seal,” (3) “I do not hide,” and (4) “I speak.” Notice that positions 2 and 3 are parallel: “I do not seal, I do not hide,” and positions 1 and 4 are parallel: “I proclaim, I speak.”

Also in a Hebrew chiasm positions 1 and 4, the beginning and the ending, shout the main emphasis. This writer adamantly vows, “I will not be silenced in the great assembly. I will tell of God’s goodness.”

New Songs Are For All

So, what’s the point? Not just religious “big shots” experience God’s goodness! God does so many wonders among his people that they cannot be counted. And you don’t have to be a professional theologian in order to proclaim God’s goodness in the great assembly. When this writer vows that he will not hide God’s saving help in his heart and will not conceal his steadfast love and faithfulness, he is bucking the trend which threatened to silence the simple piety of common people. Those “too many to declare” deeds of God must be declared by the very ones who experience them. So today we need new songs, and some of the best ones may come out of the quiet persons on the pew who must find new ways to release the exuberance of their hearts. New songs need not be the expressions of professional musicians who sing music of the old “religious” genre; new songs express the praise of common people who experience God’s uncommon loving power.

AfterGlow: Two Men

by Phillip Morrison
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The two men belonged to the same generation but had little else in common.

Dwight David Eisenhower was an American hero who led the Allies to victory in Europe in World War II and later became the 34th president of the United States. When those of us who remember Ike are dead, future generations will know him through history books and television documentaries.

Ernesto Estevez was born in the United States but he never abandoned his Latin heritage. Spending most of his life as a missionary in Cuba, he was forced to return to the United States by Fidel Castro's revolutionary government. When those of us who have fond memories of Estevez are all dead, future generations will know little about his work or even his name.

One thing Eisenhower and Estevez did share was an understanding of true leadership. Eisenhower is reported to have challenged his staff officers to move a piece of string in a desired direction. After several had pushed the string, only to produce an aimless tangle, Ike smiled and said, "Here's the way to move strings...or people." As he pulled rather than pushed, the string followed obediently throughout its length.

When Estevez knew his death was near, he made me promise to conduct a simple funeral. Three songs, the reading of a familiar psalm and an Edgar A. Guest poem, and a prayer would be the entire service. His wish was honored as I read "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." and "I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day. I'd rather one would walk with me than merely show the way...."

Two men, one famous and one scarcely known, had learned well the lessons of leadership. At least one had learned those lessons from Jesus "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant..." (Philippians 2:7).

There's a lot of talk about leadership. Expensive seminars purport to teach the secrets of leadership. Too often they emphasize key words such as power, intimidation, and domination.

For the Christian who would lead, however, the first lesson to be learned is not how to lead but how to follow. The principles governing biblical leadership were clearly set forth by Jesus himself: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).