

# **Wineskins Magazine**

## **Evangelism**

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## Learning Rules and Feelings Needs

by Mike Cope  
July – August, 1993

As Barney Fife might have put it, we had only two hard-and-fast rules in our family when we went to Table Rock Lake:

*Rule # 1 – “Obey all rules.”*

*Rule # 2 – “Everyone wears a life jacket or ski vest while swimming until they have passed a class in lifesaving.”*

So that was my goal from my earliest memories: to be a bona fide, card-carrying lifesaver. Fuel was thrown on the fire of this passion by my favorite song at church:

*Throw out the lifeline across the dark wave;  
There is a brother whom someone should save;  
Somebody’s brother! O who then will dare  
To throw out the lifeline, his peril to share?*

It was a fun song, a mental escape from church, transporting me back to the dock I loved in a Table Rock cove. Only later did the evangelistic point of the song’s metaphor sink in.

*Throw out the lifeline to danger-fraught men,  
Sinking in anguish where you’ve never been;  
Winds of temptation and billows of woe  
Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow.*

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to save someone’s life in the water, I mused. Fortunately I never had to exercise my expertise. Only once did I even get close. While I was certifying to scuba dive, a young woman in the class hit the panic button in seven feet of water. She was quickly in trouble, bobbing under the surface, losing the skills to breathe as panic victims often do. So I reached over and popped off her weight belt. Immediately her buoyancy kept her afloat. With her diving gear on in this shallow calm spot, she couldn’t have drowned if she’d wanted to.

My actions were pretty unspectacular. There was no purple-heart courage or Red-Cross skills involved. I just did what anyone would do; unbuckle a belt.

My fascination with water and lifesaving has made me a student of the *Titanic*. And there’s a part of the story that still puzzles me.

In Walter Lord’s book *The Night Lives On* he interviews one of the survivors, Eva Hart, who recalls: “I saw all the horror of its sinking, and I heard, even more dreadful, the cries of drowning people.” And yet many who listened to those cries didn’t respond! Of the 10 lifeboats launched in those wee morning hours on April 15, 1912 while the unsinkable ship took its final bow, most of them were only partially filled.

Only lifeboat # 14 rowed back, darting after a few more pleading calls. The others feared being swamped by extra survivors. How could lifeboats not save lives? My old favorite implied the same question:

*Soon will the season of rescue be o'er,  
Soon will they drift to eternity's shore;  
Haste then, my brother, no time for delay.  
But throw out the lifeline and save them today.*

This question must be asked by Christians. How could people delivered from the depths of sin not help rescue others? Don't they care? Do they think they're under-qualified? Is it not their gift? Aren't they thankful to the one who plucked them out of the icy seas?

Our need in Churches of Christ isn't another big guilt trip. We tried that a few years ago and it didn't work. (Guilt usually doesn't!) Our need is for greater memory: to recall and relive the saving experience we've had in Christ. Our need is for deeper faith: to reencounter the Son of God who has delivered us again and again. And our need is gratitude: to share the good news with lost people, not to win us bonus points with God but to express our deep thanks for his election in Jesus Christ.

## Faith Must Be Personal

by Rubel Shelly  
July – August, 1993

Let me tell you the story of two people's faith. These are real people. And my hope is that their stories are uncharacteristic of Christian people.

The first is the story of a preacher who was fired when it was discovered that he had sexually abused three children in his church – his eleven-year-old daughter and two of her friends. When I learned he had moved to Nashville in search of a job, I tracked him down and invited him to lunch. We met at a restaurant and made small talk while waiting to be seated. While trying to find the right opening and words to let him know that I cared about him and wanted to help him get things back on track with his life, he took the initiative. "There are some things you believe that I need to let you know I disagree with," he said. "I understand you have a chorus at Woodmont Hills and that your people applaud at baptisms."

The second is the story of a college student. She grew up in a Christian home. Both the people back home and her teachers here think highly of her. But some things had been going wrong in her life. She had been experimenting with alcohol and marijuana – and had done cocaine once. She said she really didn't see as much danger in any of them as her parents did. Her immediate problem was she had found out three days before that she had gonorrhea. She had slept with three different guys a number of times during the past year. "But I haven't missed church a time since leaving home. Even when one of the guys and I would spend the weekend in Knoxville," she told me, "I'd make him get up and go to church with me on Sunday morning."

What's wrong with these stories? Both reflect real-life instances of church members who lack personal faith. One was living a tradition-bound faith that could perpetuate and put up with child molestation for over three years but could not abide a piece of special music or applause at a baptism. The other was living her parents' faith about the importance of attending religious services while her own lifestyle was blatantly contradictory to the values those services are meant to undergird and affirm.

### THREE KINDS OF FAITH

The late Paul Little distinguished three kinds of faith. The first two can be, in his words, "strictly environmental, an outgrowth of your surroundings."

Some people have *indoctrination faith*. They have gone to the right places, sung the right hymns, and can give all the right answers about what they know as the plan of salvation. They wouldn't think of missing church without a really good reason. They can quote a lot of Bible verses. But they have never really met the Christ they have studied about and have made no personal commitment to him.

Then there are people with *conformity faith*. These people do reasonably well when they are in Christian surroundings. When they are in a church meeting, in a school or work situation surrounded by Christians, or with family, they do all the right things and practically none of the wrong ones. Put them with people whose values and behavior are sub-Christian or leave them to make their own decisions about what to do, however, and – using Little’s words – they will “shed their faith like a raincoat.”

The third kind of faith is called *commitment faith*. This is the faith which goes deeper than tradition, family, or mere intellectual acceptance of the facts about Jesus and salvation. It is life-changing commitment to Christ as Lord. It is serious obedience to the Word of God. It is self-giving love to people who are hard to love.

Do you remember the Old Testament story of Daniel? When he was carried off to Babylon while still a young man, he faced temptations the like of which he had never faced before. Instead of caving in to them and using his unfriendly circumstances as an excuse, he overcame them. Instead of conforming to his environment, he had a redemptive impact on his environment. That’s an example of commitment faith.

## **UNEXAMINED FAITH**

Socrates was the Greek thinker who insisted, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” And an unexamined faith is not worth having. It is not your own. It is not grounded in integrity. It will not survive the serious challenges that lie ahead for you.

A hundred years ago, William Clifford wrote an essay titled “The Ethics of Belief.” He imagined a ship owner who was about to send one of his vessels to sea. He knew it was old, not well built at the beginning, and needed several repairs. An inspector told him it was possibly not seaworthy.

The doubts troubled him. Perhaps he should overhaul and refit the ship. But that would have been very expensive. So, before the ship sailed, he overcame his melancholy reflections and saw off its crew and passengers. He would put his trust in Providence. After all, the ship had made scores of voyages safely and weathered many a storm. Surely God would protect the happy families with small children who were aboard. He waved at the excited travelers from the dock, expressed his strong faith that they would have a safe voyage to the people standing nearby, and collected his insurance money when the ship went down in mid-ocean.

Now let’s change one feature of the story. Suppose the ship was not unsafe at all and that it made the trip – and many more after it – safely. Do you think better of the ship owner now? Is his guilt diminished in your eyes? Whatever the outcome of the voyage, Clifford argued, the man was a scoundrel. What happened on the trip has nothing to do with the faith the ship owner placed in his ship. Regardless of outcome, he had no right to believe in the safety of his ship on the basis of the evidence at hand. His doubts were not erased by investigation of the facts but by suppressing the hard questions.

Clifford summarized the point of his illustration at the end of his article:

To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it – the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF PERSONALIZING FAITH**

The church of Jesus Christ must challenge people to make their faith personal. Every congregation of believers needs to be a place that not only allows but encourages people to ask questions and investigate for themselves. The goal of good teachers is not to spoon feed theology but to give people the tools and methods for getting into Scripture for themselves.

The first step in making your faith personal is *immersion in the Word of God*. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). The Bible is the mine from which a personal faith is unearthed.

The second step to a personal faith is a *willingness to submit your life to Christ as Lord*. At the level of knowledge of and consent to the truth, demons are believers. James said they not only believe but believe deeply (i.e., “shudder”) that there is one God (James 2:19). But, of course, they are not believers in any redemptive sense precisely because knowledge is not enough. There must be the surrendering of one’s life in obedience to him.

An interesting phenomenon about the growth of faith is that one must immediately combine action with faith or shut down the process. The first time you resist the truth you are learning and set yourself in disobedience to God, you close off the possibility of growth beyond that point. Just as upper-level courses in college have prerequisites, so the prerequisite to spiritual maturity is faithfulness in the little things you are learning along the way (Matthew 15:14-25).

The third step to personal faith is *the ability to tolerate diversity* within the body of Christ. The desire to control the developing faith of another Christian is a mark of spiritual immaturity. “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” asked Paul. “To his own master he stands or falls” (Romans 14:4a). The day you let another human being control the content of your faith is the day you cease having personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his *The Basis of Christian Unity*, Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote: “The ultimate question facing us these days is whether our faith is in men and their power to organize, or in the truth of God in Christ Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.” Unity in the faith must not be confused with conformity. The drive to make people conform is a human agenda accomplished by the flesh; unity is the work of the Holy Spirit among the body’s diverse parts.

## **CONCLUSION**

Faith must be more than a commitment to the past. In fact, the past is what every Christian is trying to rise above for the sake of a glorious future with God.

As much as I love my godly parents, their faith cannot be transmitted like eye and hair color. As much as I love my children, I don't want them to have my faith. I want them to have their own. As much as I respect and cherish my heritage in the American Restoration Movement, I want a faith grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ rather than in a historical heritage.

The challenge to the church in this generation is to create an atmosphere for personal faith. Whose faith are you living today?

## She Sat on a Pew

*by Joe Beam*  
*July – August, 1993*

They sat on a bus while she worshipped Jesus.

They had traveled far and felt a need to relax. She had worked all day, every day, all week and yearned to join in a celebration of praise. She heartily sang those simple songs requiring little or no musical skill, losing herself in worship of her God. They saved their voices for the *really* uplifting singing that would come later... the catchy melodies, the poignant words, the amplified voices, the cacophony of their vocal symphony.

She underlined verses in her careworn Bible as she followed the message of the preacher, occasionally jotting notes to rethink later. They remained outside preparing themselves for their message in song, choosing not to be distracted by those who preceded their performance.

She applauded as they were introduced and thrilled as they sang. She cheered, she laughed; she cried. They used their talents to lead her to a level of emotion she didn't often experience in worship.

She spoke to them in the foyer. They autographed their shirt she purchased; guided her to their tapes; gave her a pledge card to contribute to their ministry; then waited for the man who would give them their check.

When she and the others had gone they folded their money tables and repackaged their remaining tapes and shirts. As they drove away in their bus they compared inventory to collections and checked their maps. As she drove home she listened to the tapes and sang to Jesus.

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He sat in an office while she worshipped Jesus.

He had traveled far and felt a need to relax. She'd spent a hectic weekend with a sick child and felt a need for spiritual renewal. She prayed and sang and caressed her worn Bible as one massaging the shoulders of an old friend. She warmly anticipated his advertised skill and hoped that he would make the Word come to life in her heart.

He sat in an office and contemplated his calendar as one reexamining his trophy wall. The undesirable appointments – those with too few people, too little prestige, or too little money – had been replaced with appointments appropriate to his status. He checked his outline and made an adjustment he thought might more powerfully impact this audience. He heard the singing, prayed quickly, and headed for the arena, tugging his cuffs and tightening his tie as he walked.

He had worked with this worship leader before and knew he would prepare the audience well. They would be ready when it was time for the real spiritual uplifting he would bring.

She absorbed every word he said. She laughed, she cried, she learned more about Jesus. She praised God for giving such gifts to this teacher. His voice, his gestures, his understanding of the Word, and his stories intertwined into eloquence. He touched her heart and strengthened her spirit.

She shook his hand and thanked him for helping her. She asked if he might have a few moments to share her life and gain his counsel. He smiled with practiced affection and declined gracefully. Inwardly he rejected the frustration of spending time with her, listening to those same old problems he used to hear in his early ministry. He now knew that wasn't his gift. His gift was preaching and he couldn't let this "problem person" take any of the focus from that gift. He'd be gone tomorrow, she needed someone local to talk to. Besides, arrangements had already been made to enjoy a pleasant meal with several of the prominent church members at the country club.

He lunched with dignitaries and forgot her name. She prayed for him and his ministry.

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He stood at a booth while she worshipped Jesus.

He believed in his ministry and chose not to leave his booth for fear of missing latecomers. She had taken unpaid leave to attend this gathering and wanted all the spiritual good she could gain.

She browsed the booths during the breaks, buying and subscribing. She studied the schedule, choosing her classes carefully, disappointedly longing for a way she could attend them all. She ordered more tapes than her budget allowed. She attended every celebration, giving her whole being to singing, praying, and listening.

She stopped by his booth, learned of his dedication to his cause, and became a participant in his ministry. He worked hard all day, visiting with the guardians of other booths when things were slow. As the evening celebration started he knew the booth traffic would not reappear until morning. He straightened his display, loosened his tie, and headed for the restaurant. She looked for a seat; he looked for the door. His ministry was done for this day. God wouldn't need him again until tomorrow. If anything exciting happened in the evening service, he would buy the tape. He appreciated workshops but his ministry got outside of buildings and really made things happen in people's lives.

Exhausted but uplifted she left the last service of the last day of the workshop. She walked by his empty booth. He'd left when the crowds thinned. He had packed his ministry neatly into boxes and gone looking for the next market of ministry supporters. He had done well. The results were good and the trip was justified.

He gained a greater base for his ministry. She gained a greater knowledge of Jesus.

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They sat on a bus visualizing how they would enthrall and enthuse their audience.

He sat in an office thinking of which illustration to close with to get the most response from his audience.

He stood at a booth figuring how to get more people to involve themselves in his ministry.

She sat on a pew worshipping Jesus, wanting to be his disciple.

Jesus sat on the pew with her.

## **Evangelism in the 90s: Rick Atchley Interviews Milton Jones**

*by Rick Atchley and Milton Jones  
July – August, 1993*

**ATCHLEY – How do you view prospects for evangelism in the '90s? Will our message be in season or out of season?**

JONES – I definitely think that our message is “in season.” Paul says that we are to preach it when it is in season and out of season, but I think that there is an extra motivation to get the word out when it is in season. This great openness to the gospel in our country will be seen especially through 1995. During the next two years, we might see the greatest receptivity of our lifetime. The unchurched of America are seeking churches. They are beyond open. Open is when they will come to church when you invite them. Beyond open means they are coming even when they are not receiving invitations. However, most of these seekers will have found a church by 1995. As a result, some churches are going to see unparalleled growth during the next few years.

**ATCHLEY – What is changing today that will impact us?**

JONES – Everything. When I was in college, a marketing professor told our class that the only constant today is change. We all laughed. I don't think anyone would laugh today. Francis Schaeffer in his studies during the '70s on Western Civilization said in reflection on the '60s that the changes that previously took a century to make now take a decade. I believe that these changes of past decades would now only take a year. You can see this most vividly in Eastern Europe. Who would have thought communism could fall so quickly?

Because of our acceptance of change, we have become very anti-traditional. This is very true in churches. And these people who are seeking churches are looking for non-traditional churches that are contemporary in ministry, evangelism, worship, and organization. People today are open to Jesus but not to every kind of church. There was a word coined in the '70s called “satisficing.” It meant that if you could have some things that you liked, you would put up with other things that you don't like. Most people of the '90s don't want to satisfice. They are looking for what they really want.

**ATCHLEY – What does this mean for Churches of Christ?**

JONES – It means that we have some problems if we don't change some things. We have a lot of traditions that we don't like, much less the outsider. Being non-denominational is good because it means that we can change quickly. But a lot of us are fearful to make the changes that need to be made.

Our “Back to the Bible” movement is not unique anymore. You can find a church on nearly any corner that agrees with that. Years ago we had something like an iron curtain around our members in the Churches of Christ. They didn't know what was out there in the rest of the

religious world. Now that iron curtain is down. And once they have seen the freedom that's out there, they are not going to be the same. They are going to want change.

**ATCHLEY –How do you understand evangelism in terms of the church's mission? Is it the sole purpose of the church or just one of them?**

JONES – I see the church as the body of Christ. As Jesus was here on earth, we are to be – we are to walk in his steps. So it's hard for me to get far away from what he said in Luke 19:10 – that Jesus “came to seek and save the lost.” It doesn't mean that we don't do other things or that our benevolence is conditional (because it wasn't with Jesus), but things in the church ought to relate to seeking and saving the lost. As Paul said, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” 1 Corinthians 9:22). We need to be asking, “Is this a possible means to save some?”

**ATCHLEY – How are Churches of Christ doing in terms of growing through evangelism?**

JONES – Not very well. There are very few that are having significant growth through reaching the unchurched.

**ATCHLEY – Were we really “the fastest growing religious group in America” in the 1950s?**

JONES – I don't know. It's debatable, but we were growing.

**ATCHLEY –What has changed?**

JONES – Nearly everything but us. As I said, we live in a world that's changing and sometimes we haven't. Therefore, we are too often not on the cutting edge. For instance, let's talk about methods of evangelism. Christianity Today did its largest survey ever on Evangelism in the '90s. They found that the predominant way people were led to conversions today is through general talk and natural discussion about Jesus (54%). Yet we tend to think that the answer is in giving a canned personal salvation plan (only effective with 1%) or media approaches (less than 1)). These plans worked in the '50s, but not now.

**ATCHLEY – Most people pick churches that minister to them. How do you get an inward-looking church to look outward? How do you move people from focusing on their own needs to considering first the needs of others – particularly non-Christians?**

JONES –It's difficult, and a sermon or seminar won't do it. We have a lot of seagulls up here in the Pacific Northwest. I have heard that seagulls break open mussel shells by taking them up a hundred feet and then dropping them to the pavement. Sometimes it takes something dramatic to open a tightly encased world. In the case of an inward looking Christian, it may take a personal crisis or a significant and dramatic spiritual renewal.

**ATCHLEY –If we continue to stress grace as a church, what implications does that have for us evangelistically?**

JONES – It depends on what kind of grace it is – costly or cheap.

**ATCHLEY – Do grace-oriented churches tend to become less evangelistic?**

JONES – They have in the Churches of Christ which makes me think whatever we were preaching as grace may not have been what the Bible meant. We need to rediscover grace or perhaps discover it for the first time. Grace can be nothing more than a reaction to legalism. It could be simply a doctrine to allow you to justify your burnout and inactivity. This is especially true in a large church. The Fuller Institute says always 60% and commonly up to 90% of their members come from Christians seeking a haven of anonymity where they can take some rest and relaxation from the burnout of smaller churches. Large churches get that way for two reasons – successful ministry and the failure of the small church.

**ATCHLEY – Do large churches face unique challenges in evangelism?**

JONES – Yes. First of all, can the big church have intensive fellowship and discipleship on a small level and still remain a large church? True discipleship can't take place on a mass level. It must be personal. Evangelism must be more than converting people to a big, exciting assembly. There must be a personal relationship with Jesus and his fellow disciples. And secondly, can the leaders of a large church survive? For survival in a large church, there needs to be a decentralization of leadership to not only help out the staff and elders but also to create opportunities for other people to grow.

**ATCHLEY – What kinds of churches do you think will be the most successful in evangelism in the '90s? What traits will they have in common?**

JONES – Many will grow, but few will grow through evangelism. In *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, Carl George labels the evangelistic church of the '90s as the "Meta Church." "Meta" means change. The distinction of the Meta-church will not be its size but its ability to use its skills and energies to modify traditional church infrastructures. (In other words, it can change quickly.) They will be known primarily for two activities equally as important: a large celebration time of worship and small groups.

**ATCHLEY – You are noted for your emphasis on groups in your church. Do you think the importance of groups will grow or wane in the '90s?**

JONES – Discipleship Journal says that it will be the most effective way to reach people in the '90s. Carl George says it will be effective beyond the '90s. Tony Campolo thinks it might not be as effective in evangelism with the Baby Busters, but groups will still be effective in their discipleship and maturity. The problem is that most of the effective group ministries in the U. S. have been done by para-church groups. In fact, it is still the para-church groups that are doing most of the evangelism in the U. S. You hear about churches that are effective in doing evangelism, but in reality, there are few of them. The key for the future will be for the church itself to have an effective group ministry. It is possible. The New Hope Community Church in Portland has around 6000 in small groups. They estimate that 85% of the people were unchurched when they first came to these groups.

**ATCHLEY – How do you get evangelism into friendship or lifestyle evangelism?**

JONES – This is extremely important because it is the most effective way to reach people today. Studies show that 75% to 90% of church members are in a particular church because of their friends or relatives.

**ATCHLEY – Have these approaches become cop outs for never verbalizing faith?**

JONES – Too often they have. In some cases there has been friendship but no friendship evangelism. For evangelism to take place, there ultimately has to be proclamation or the telling of good news.

**ATCHLEY – How do you develop meaningful relationships with non-Christians when all your friends are Christians?**

JONES – The truth is that we do have some non-Christian relationships. There are people in our lives who don't know Jesus (maybe it's the paper boy, a co-worker, a neighbor). The Institute of American Church Growth says the average Christian has 8.6 relationships with the unchurched (the older Christian close to six, the newer closer to twelve). The need then is to identify these people, get to know them better, pray for them, share experiences with them, identify receptive times in their lives, get other Christians to be with them, and tell them about Jesus.

**ATCHLEY – There is a lot of talk today in religious circles about reaching “baby boomers.” Why?**

JONES – They comprise at least one-third of the American population. If you count their children also, they comprise more than 50%. They are the most influential group in the U. S. and the most different. Without them, you don't have much of a future. Plus, they are the most open.

**ATCHLEY – What are they looking for in a church?**

JONES – Worship, help with their children, meaning to life, Jesus really. They are not that different from the people in John 12 who said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” They may not know it, but what they are really looking for is Jesus.

**ATCHLEY – What are the dangers of appealing to them?**

JONES – They are probably the most selfish generation in history. They want things their way. There will always be a fine line between marketing the church and compromising our commitment. We must always know where that line is.

**ATCHLEY – How can Churches of Christ in the Bible Belt overcome some of the negative perceptions others have of us in order to reach more people?**

JONES – Go after the unchurched. It's the churched that are prejudiced against us. The reason is that much of the early Restoration Movement was a reaction to other churches in America. As a

result, most of our approaches to evangelism were designed to show how your church was wrong and ours was right. Over 95% of church growth today comes from other churches. Less than 5% come through conversions. Seek the unchurched. Whatever view they have of you will be because of you rather than someone else who preceded you.

**ATCHLEY – Some are saying church planting is the way to reach people in the ‘90s. Do you agree? What does that say for older churches?**

JONES – I’ve been told that “Church Growth” was the topic of the ‘70s, “Church Planting” the topic of the ‘80s, and “Church Renewal” will be the topic of the ‘90s. I think there are a lot of us looking for existing churches to have renewals. We want to know, “Can these bones live again?”

A great book on church renewal is *Bringing the Church Back to Life* by Daniel Buttry. In it he quotes Emmet Johnson: “A renewed church is a corporate group (and body) to which it is fun to belong. Its worship is contagious. But it cannot look at the world with dry eyes because the Christ who called the church into being is terribly concerned.” According to his definition there are three aspects to a renewed church. It is fun to belong to it, worship is alive, and it has a big heart and concern for the problems in our world.

I like the definition of revival in one of the old Welsh Revivals: “the churches are full of people and the people are full of God.”

**ATCHLEY – Why is evangelism more difficult in existing congregations?**

JONES – Evangelism is not why people are there in many churches. Many are there because they were born and raised there. Others go because of another attraction that has nothing to do with evangelism. Some are there because they were evangelized (these will want to be more evangelistic). There are some who choose a church because they see it as evangelistic, but this is getting rarer in the Churches of Christ.

**ATCHLEY – Is there nothing we can do but accept who we are and make planting new churches our chief strategy for reaching the lost?**

JONES – I hope not. I’m for planting new churches. We need to. But churches reproduce after their own kind. We believe in the God of the resurrection; surely he can resurrect the church!

## **A Middle of the Road Church Reaches Out and Stays Together**

*by Michael L. Lewis  
July – August, 1993*

Can a congregation fearing all extremes, desiring neither to be too contemporary nor too traditional still connect with the current culture of seekers?

The answer is, “yes...” But not extremely, “Yes!” However, a simple yes is enough for congregations with multi-generational heritages. Such congregations cannot afford to become extremely anything in a short period of time without great damage to unity. Such congregations do not turn on a dime. If they did, they would hardly be worth a dime. Congregations with a multi-generational heritage must turn more like ocean liners, so slowly at times that the change is unnoticeable but the correct destination is almost always eventually reached. Strangely, a large number of folks will even pay extra for the joy of the slower journey.

In my part of the country, the “middle of the road” is considered a place of doom for both armadillos and preachers. “This is Texas, man... you’re supposed to draw the line, choose your side, take a stand, and attack all challengers!” And on it goes.

I belong, however, to another kingdom not made with hands where balance and moderation in matters of style can be wise... even Christ-like.

The Bammel Road church is a twenty-two-year-old unashamedly “middle-of-the-road” congregation. My elders have deliberately mapped a course of the “golden mean” in all matters of style. For example, our announced congregational worship style is an attempt to blend contemporary and traditional forms. A rare presentation of drama as well as the more traditional sermon is used to teach. Songs by Handel, Stamps-Baxter, and Twila Paris are often sung back-to-back. Occasionally a choral group sings at the beginning or the end of a worship period.

“Now did the worship assembly begin or end before or after the group sang?”

Such questions are left intentionally unanswered, allowing Christians present to assign the individual interpretation necessary to remain consistent with their personal spiritual convictions.

“Are there tensions with such diversity and intentional vagueness?” (Excuse me while I chuckle at the question.)

Of course there are some tensions. We are moving “too fast” for some and “too slow” for others which adds up to “just the right speed” for a middle-of-the-road congregation concerned about the whole. There is a clear awareness on the part of the staff and the elder leadership that church growth experts say congregations who choose middle-of-the-road paths simply “take turns” insulting different segments of a congregation. We choose to describe it by another perspective, and suggest it enhances spiritual maturity in a multi-generational congregation to acknowledge diversity and allow all generational preferences an opportunity to be fulfilled at times and at

times sacrificed for the loving sake of others. Consider this principle applied to reaching those “seekers” in the community.

We engage in a large variety of outreach styles. Every generation has its favorite. A special sermon series on “How to Share the Gospel With a Friend” doubles as a traditional gospel meeting for those who want to use such to reach their friends. A team well-schooled in teaching the gospel by filmstrips is always at work searching for people interested in such...and there are some still interested. In general, we have found different generations of seekers, like different generations of believers, have different preferences for styles of communication of the gospel. We attempt to match up seekers with believing witnesses by generation, religious background and philosophical perspective to enhance the likelihood of making a connection. Thankfully, the world of seekers consists of more than just baby boomers and their children.

Everyone in the congregation is not equipped to witness for Christ as they need to be so a number of weeks each year are given to equipping and discipling within the context of a traditional assembly format. However, this is balanced with several weeks each year given exclusively to outreach toward the primary generation of our community...the 35-50 age group... yes, the infamous “boomer” crowd.

There are three times each year the average seeker is most prone to attend a church service, Christmas, Easter, and Mother’s Day; therefore, we plan a highly focused outreach period between Easter and Mother’s Day each Spring. The morning assemblies are more contemporary in music style and message topics. The traditional evening service is completely replaced by a seminar format with lectures, question and answer periods, punch and cookies, book displays, etc. The importance of Christ is never absent for any activity or message. However, the style and content during this outreach period is totally oriented toward the contemporary seeker.

Last year’s morning themes relating to family, work habits and forgiveness were combined with an evening seminar on “How to Divorce-Proof Your Marriage.” Advertising in focused layers using billboards, newspaper, radio, and cable television were used. In that six-week period (between Easter and Mother’s Day), approximately 1,000 community guests participated in some regularly scheduled meeting of the Bammel congregation. About \$12,000 was spent on the effort (about 1% of our yearly congregational budget) and it involved over 200 members of the congregation in some direct aspect of the outreach effort. A thousand guests in six weeks! It was beyond anyone’s dreams (an unfortunate commentary on the limits of our dreams). As a result, we were out-numbered, under-manned for follow-up and may not have used the opportunity wisely enough. But it was a strong message to all about the future possibilities.

We are now putting the finishing touches on this year’s spring outreach plan, complete with a larger advertising budget, more detailed follow-up efforts that will run into the summer months, additional community Bible classes and other activities that will spin off the spring effort. We are even going to expand our sunrise service at the local golf course on the morning the world celebrates Easter to connect with more people in the area. All this is contemporary outreach strategy, yet if you drop in to visit us next October, you will probably find a fairly traditional assembly, and expository preaching on some aspect of Christian maturity. If you could take a picture of the entire year at one time, you would notice the balanced composition of the photo,

balanced between things old and new, reaching out to guests and inward equipping of diversely different saints.

Perhaps the next most natural question is, “Why not engage in that contemporary evangelistic style year-round?”

For a zero-history, new congregation, such a year-round style is possible. However, after a generation or two, such an intensely evangelistic style is far more difficult. It is the *difference between Acts and Hebrews*. The larger and older you become, the more diverse and different you become. Believers soon need more than just a passion for the lost, but also need to know how to keep their marriages together, their thirst for deeper biblical insight alive, and their sense of Christian joy free from the entanglements of materialism, suffering and loss. For sure, the importance of witnessing can help direct our steps in every aspect of life, but so can the importance of a united fellowship.

Jesus tied outreach inseparably to unity within the family of disciples in his prayers (John 17:20-23). The image of our Lord praying for our oneness and that through such unity the world may believe, should never be too far from our hearts as we choose how things should be done.

That wonderful interpreter of Christ, the Apostle Paul, should stir us and guide us. He was the essence of focus and flexibility. His focus was uncompromisingly upon exalting Christ, but his flexibility was always connected to the diversity of the group he was trying to reach. Whether in Pisidian Antioch in a Jewish synagogue (Acts 13) or in Athens on Mars Hill (Acts 17), Paul the student of culture was ready to connect with the hearers’ background and world view. Yet, this man who endeavored to become all things to all men (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) did not restrict his unending flexibility and nonnegotiable focus to seekers, but also believers. That is what the council in Jerusalem demonstrated (Acts 15), or his teaching about meats and days (Romans 14 and 15). Perhaps even most telling of all is Paul, the great missionary teacher of freedom from ritualistic law, back in Jerusalem taking part in a ceremonial purification ritual in the temple (Acts 20:20-26). Why? It was for the sake of unity in the church in Jerusalem. Who would doubt Paul’s convictions about freedom in Christ? But he also believed in unity within the body of Christ and lived accordingly. So must we all, especially we who work with older congregations.

We witness about the truth in love. To simply proclaim the truth without regard for people is not really the truth. To simply be concerned with the attitudes and lives of people is not really love. Both are required to know either one over a lifetime with Christ and his people.

## **That Awful “E” Word**

*by Sally Jane Shank  
July – August, 1993*

Everybody feels guilty about it. The awful “E” word. “I can’t do it,” we claim, as we try to avoid even singing it. “I don’t have that gift,” we rationalize. But somebody has to say it. Somebody has to do it. *Evangelism*.

Perhaps the major problem with the “É” word among average people is that they set their expectations too high. Even Paul, who gets an A-plus on the “E word, talks about evangelism in terms that the average person can understand and practice.

At the end of Colossians, Paul reveals his approach to evangelism: “And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ” (Colossians 4:3). Three essential elements of evangelism – open doors, prayer, and proclamation – emerge from these verses. Rather than three separate entities, these resources work together like the legs of a three-legged stool.

Most of us are not like Paul. Three friends of mine, Karen, Jane, and Frances, certainly aren’t. They don’t preach. They don’t lead churches. They haven’t gone to the mission field. Yet, all three use the same three resources to evangelize.

### **EVANGELISM THROUGH OPEN DOORS**

As part of her work in the church visitation program, Karen knocked on a door one Monday afternoon. A young woman greeted her. As the two talked about the young woman’s visit to the church the previous week, they learned they were both pregnant.

With that new-found common ground, the two started to see each other weekly. Karen introduced her new friend to other Christians. Their conversations revolved around everything from childbirth and pediatricians to Jesus and Christian living. The casual relationship grew into a friendship.

A homemaker, Karen had no particular training in evangelism. She wasn’t the outreach minister, and elder, deacon, preacher, or involvement minister. She just took advantage of an opportunity.

Jane McWhorter, in her book *Now I Can Fly*, writes, “We do not wait for great opportunities. We make our own as we walk through life.” Karen made an opportunity when she decided to call upon a first-time church visitor. She didn’t have to. She didn’t know the woman. Eight months pregnant, everything took extra effort. Instead of excuses, Karen made an opportunity.

Imagine the preacher, an elder, or even the apostle Paul knocking on the young woman’s door. Even with a greeting as warm as Karen’s, the chance of a friendship developing would be slim. Through the friendship of an average Christian, the young woman eventually came to Christ.

What began as two strangers meeting on a doorstep resulted in two lives knit together in friendship in the Lord.

## **EVANGELISM THROUGH PRAYER**

Prayer works hand-in-hand with opportunities. First, prayer helps provide opportunities. Second, prayer opens eyes to see opportunities. Third, prayer enables us to act on the opportunities.

Like Karen, Jane looked for opportunities to help people know God. She invited the unchurched to services. No one came. She talked to people at work. No one seemed interested. With every door closed, Jane began to pray, making these entries in her spiritual journal:

*“I pray for an open door to reach others.”*

*“I want to talk with somebody who wants to know you, Lord. Show me the right person. Lead me to some soul today.”*

*“Let my purpose be to bring you glory and bring others to you.”*

*“What are your plans for me, Father? Who do you want me to share with? Open my eyes.”*

*“I pray that the opportunities that come my way will be opportunities sent by you.”*

These excerpts from Jane’s spiritual journal between August and December of last year reflect the direction of her prayer life. The year ended. The door remained closed.

Unknown to Jane, a single woman living in the same city also prayed that fall. She asked God for spiritual direction.

One evening in January, Jane and the young woman met. They talked. They met for lunch. They exchanged personal stories. When the single woman found the answers in God’s Word, she became a follower of Jesus.

A few weeks after her baptism, Jane received this note from her new young friend: “I prayed for a friend who would accept my level of spiritual understanding and encourage me to move beyond it to a deeper relationship with the Lord. I know God arranged it all. I praise him for answering my prayer.”

Then Jane understood. Their meeting didn’t happen by chance. God answered both prayers. The young woman wanted a friend. A counselor or minister could offer spiritual direction or theological understanding, but she prayed for a friend. Jane, an average Christian, became that friend.

Never overlook the resource of prayer. Prayer helped Jane in three ways. (1) it enabled God to provide an opportunity; (2) it allowed Jane to see; and (3) it empowered her to act.

Evangelism begins with prayer. Pray for opportunities and let God open the doors.

## **EVANGELISM THROUGH PROCLAMATION**

Doors opened by prayer eventually lead to proclamation. Karen, Jane, and Frances would all say, "I can't say anything about my faith. I'm not a proclaimer."

Proclaiming Jesus sounds hard. It can be difficult. But not all proclamation requires a certain method, vast Bible background, or ready answers to difficult questions. Proclamation can be easy in two different ways. Every Christian knows both of these simple kinds of proclamation. It's as simple as telling... stories.

Frances was an average Christian woman employed outside the home. Like many working women, she went home in the evening to cook, do laundry, and take care of her family. Her coworker lived with a drug dealer and filled her non-working hours with parties, alcohol, and drugs. Her life empty, the chemicals and parties became less satisfying each week. Both women worked for a large paper supply firm.

"Why are you always so happy?" her coworker asked Frances one day at the office. That question gave Frances a chance to share the first story, her personal story of what Jesus meant in her life.

"I'm happy and have real joy because of Jesus. He gives meaning and purpose to life, even while working at the paper company." Frances also spoke of God being part of her marriage. Her story was not long, flowery, or filled with religious words. She simply shared what the Lord had done in her life.

"Go home and tell your friends what the Lord has done for you," Jesus instructed Legion after completely changing his life. Frances followed those instructions.

Every Christian can tell his story. One's background and experiences in life make the story unique. Tell a personal story by including the before, how, and after. The before describes life prior to Christ. The how tells about conversion. The after communicates the difference Christ makes in daily life.

Sharing her story led to further questions and spiritual conversations. Frances invited her coworker and boyfriend over to eat. During the evening, the conversation turned to spiritual matters. Frances used the opportunity to tell the second familiar story, the gospel.

Frances simply told the story of the trip to Calvary. Later she added how Christ had been a substitute for her. Frances quoted the line of the song: "I owed a debt I could not pay. He paid the debt he did not owe."

A few weeks later Frances introduced her coworker and boyfriend to a Christian who studied the Bible with them and answered some of their difficult questions.

They began to change. They got married. Jesus replaced alcohol and drugs. They looked forward to Sundays with Christians rather than partying. Both became Christians. The wife now has a new story to tell, one about her empty life, meeting Frances, hearing about Jesus, becoming a

Christian, and the difference Jesus made in her life. It began with an average woman sharing her story with a coworker.

Those who desire to evangelize can tell two stories about Jesus, first our personal experience of what Jesus did to us, and second, what Jesus did on the cross.

Paul used opportunities, prayer, and proclamation to reach the lost in the first century. Average Christians like Karen, Jane, and Frances use the same techniques to bring others closer to Jesus.

Ben Gay and Stephen Williford, in their book *The Winner's Edge*, tell a fable from the Near East about a man riding his camel across the desert at night. While crossing a dry river bed, he heard the ground crunching under the camel's hooves. Suddenly a voice ordered him to get off the camel. The voice directed, "Pick up some gravel from the river bed." The man obeyed. "Now go on your way," the voice told him. "In the morning you will be both glad and sorry."

At dawn the man looked at his handful of gravel. It wasn't gravel at all, but precious gems! He was glad when he realized the worth of his possessions, but sorry he couldn't go back and retrace his tracks.

The "E" word can make us both glad and sorry. Glad because of the great joy that comes when, through opportunities, prayer, and proclamation, we help lead someone to know God. Sorry because we let the "E" word scare and intimidate us so long.

## The Eclipse of Worship and Evangelism – Part 3

### The Relationship of Evangelism to Worship

*by Andre Resner*  
*July – August, 1993*

The first two articles in this series traced the historical background to the eclipse of worship and evangelism, and pointed toward a mooring for each that is not subverted by culture but rather seeks to transform culture. In this third installment I will discuss the relationship of worship to evangelism. With the scope of evangelism widened to include much more than is traditionally understood<sup>1</sup>, we cannot exclude worship from consideration as one of the aspects of evangelism.

Yet it would be a mistake to understand the worship times of the church as having a primarily evangelistic purpose. This would be to fall prey to a thoroughly American frontier development of Christian worship, namely some form of revivalism. The Lord's day worship is to be construed instead as happening because there is a community existing that has been initiated into the reign of God, i.e. evangelized. The worship of the community assumes evangelism. Worship is thus an "upreach" to God which is evoked by one's initiation into God's Kingdom. The relationship of evangelism to worship is to be seen thus as circular rather than simultaneous. One leads to the other which in turn leads again to the other. A result of an active outreach and upreach in the community of faith is what might be called an "inreach," namely edification of the body. Thus evangelism and ministries of compassion/benevolence (outreach), corporate worship<sup>2</sup> (upreach), and edification (inreach) feed and fuel one another in a circular fashion. We are focusing here on the movement from evangelism to worship.

The sacrament of transition in this is baptism.<sup>3</sup> Baptism is neither excluded from evangelism because of pragmatic reasons (and replaced with a rote prayer, or the "four spiritual laws") nor is it made the focal point.<sup>4</sup> Baptism is rather an integral part of initiation: (1) as the gate of entry into the Kingdom of God and into the visible manifestation of the Kingdom's presence on earth, the church; and (2) as a means of grace in which God acts to provide the forgiveness of sins, newness of life, purity of conscience, reorientation to the moral life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The sacramental aspect of baptism is irreducible and irreplaceable in initiating one into the Kingdom.

If the worship of God were to be reclaimed entirely without attempts to make it an "opportunity" for evangelizing, what would one do with evangelistic remnants of the nineteenth century that have become an important part of the tradition? I am thinking here about the "invitation" or "altar call." I would argue on the one hand that the invitation is not necessary as an aspect of Christian worship. Someone will object that we ought to give everyone the "opportunity" to respond to the message. This is to seriously reduce the message and its specificity of address to individual persons. If the church retains the invitation in Christian worship it should be the least of "opportunities" that the church gives the world to respond to the message. Unfortunately, because the church keeps the message pretty much boxed up in the church building, and

streamlined to a nineteenth-century sermon by Walter Scott (“Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, be Baptized”), it must continue to have the invitation, because without it evangelistic activity would virtually cease.

On the other hand, however, if, in the normal Lord’s Day worship of the church one feels the need to retain the “invitation,” one might envision the worship service beginning with a call for all present who have not been baptized into Christ to receive baptism. After this the call to worship would be extended and the Lord’s Day service of the church would begin with the newly baptized served both the proclamation of the Word and the Lord’s Supper along with the rest of the community of faith.<sup>5</sup> The worship would not attempt to culminate in a call to conversion, rather it would seek to culminate in praise of God’s glory. For worship, as von Allmen reminds us, “is addressed to God, and that is something – we must recognize it, alas! – which we have been apt to forget, as a result of the overemphasis on sermons, and the underemphasis on the sacraments.”<sup>6</sup> And Peter Brunner may not be exaggerating when he says that to confuse the movement to God in worship with the movement to humankind in evangelism is heresy. “That is why worship must not be confused with evangelism or with service, and why, in consequence, any ulterior motives of evangelism have nothing to do directly with the celebration of worship.”<sup>7</sup>

The adoration and praise of God and the resultant edification of the saints in its corporate communion in the Word and Supper give the community of the Kingdom an orientation toward its God which in turn gives it a sense of identity of both its God and itself which is indispensable in its witness within the world. The identity gained in the worship of God is not simply acquirable through substitute means such as Sunday School. Though the Sunday School could be seen as an attempt to overcome the loss of the church’s identity which is gained in worship, a loss suffered because of its forfeiture of worship of God for the sake of the evangelism of humanity, the classroom is not a viable substitute for the sanctuary. This is because Christian cognition, identity, and selfhood is not formed simply through the rational means of pedagogy. The Christian community is in the process of becoming something, a something which is not possible without being in the presence of Someone. As Christians in the process of growing up into the head who is Christ, we are not simply trying to learn about the mystery of God and existence as God’s people. Rather, we are being drawn by our God to an existence within mystery. In worship we are being formed as a people who grow into the deeper reaches of mystery. This mystery has to do with a mode of existence and a certain identity which stands in contrast to the way the world understands existence and identity. Indeed, worship is the context in which an alternative world is constituted for the community of faith.<sup>8</sup>

It is not too little to say that the future of evangelism will hinge in large measure on the community of faith reclaiming the worship of God and locating evangelism more appropriately as an outgrowth and response to the Lord’s Day event of the worship of God. To sacrifice the orientative and sacramental time of corporate worship by the community of faith to some other agenda is to offer up the worship by the saints on the altar of American pragmatism. The effective loss is of both worship and evangelism, thus a betrayal of the gospel. As Karl Barth has said so forcefully:

The Church's worship is the opus Dei, the work of God, which is carried out for its own sake. Is it not salutary and consoling to the poor pragmatic man of today to learn that here there is something which certainly does have its pragmatic side, but which cannot be justified for pragmatic reasons....<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say that worship will be comprised of only those within the community of faith. Visitors do come, and they are welcome. In speaking of the outsider present at the worship of the Corinthian church, Paul says that there is indeed a sign for unbelievers in the enthusiasts' tongue speaking: "Will they not say that you are out of your mind?" However, as Paul points out, we must remain aware of the fact that outsiders often do observe our worship and we must take that "peeking over our shoulders" into account. But that does not mean that we sell out what would compromise Christian identity and orientation for the goal of bringing in new converts. Indeed, by our refusal to compromise the prophetic element within worship the outsider may join our worship with the exclamation, "God is really among you!" Much of what the community of faith must do in its corporate worship as the visibly present manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom of God may be a "sign of insanity" to the uninitiated. That is as it should be. I am reminded of the scene in the movie *Ghandi* when the white priest (played, incidentally, by the same actor who played Eric Liddel in *Chariots of Fire*) was riding on top of the train with a number of bare-backed lower class natives. One man looked at the priest and smiled a wide toothless grin, to which the priest responded with an uncomfortable smile as they rumbled down the track. The toothless man, nodding his head at him, then said with his wide and gummy Cheshire-cat smile, "I know a Christian. He drinks blood!" The priest stared back in horror, trying not to look too alarmed, obviously wondering what kind of bizarre introduction this poor man had had to the Christian faith, when the man continued, "Blood of Christ... every Sunday!"

The early church was accused of cannibalism because of its participation in the Lord's Supper. But it did not consider the possible misunderstanding of its participation in it worth compromising its practice. To drop such elements from worship for pragmatic purposes is to compromise the heart of worship. We do not have to apologize for practices that are essential to our identity.

Let the church beware: The cost of reductionism and substitution in worship and evangelism by their continued confusion and collapse together is too high. The identity-revealing and identity-forming character of worship is essential to the church's evangelistic witness, for the church ceases to become the church when it ceases to worship. Out of its corporate worship to God, its participation in the body, blood, and Word of Christ, it is shaped again into the image of God. This sort of shaping cannot be attained by other mediums. The Christian community must overcome the mindset that thinks it must choose between either worship or evangelism. The situation is not either/or, it is both/and. The either/or mentality actually eventuates a neither/nor reality. To eclipse one with the other results in the fading and darkening of both. Rather, the church worships because humanity exists for the praise of his glory and the church is that sector of humanity who have been graciously shown that by God, have faithfully recognized that and meet together to do so. The church evangelizes because it cannot help but live out its identity in the world in ways that are communicated both verbally and non-verbally – we might even say, "more than verbally." May the church seek to discover anew the times and the places that are appropriate to live out the fullness of the Christian life in its striving to be faithful to its

“upreach” to God (lament, praise, thanksgiving, etc.), its “inreach” to itself (edification and education), and its “outreach” to the world (benevolent compassion and evangelization which leads to initiation which leads to worship).

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1 This article will not address in specifics the matter of methods in evangelism. Such an issue is beyond the scope of this study. Questions of method ought to be an outgrowth of a theological orientation to what evangelism is, how it relates to worship, and the individual factors of the cultural context in which evangelism is carried out. To attempt to summarize method in evangelism in an article such as this would necessarily be reductive.

2 I am by no means claiming that worship only happens when the community gathers at the church building. I believe that all of one’s life can be an act of worship. In this article I am focusing however on that unique and necessary time when the entire body of believers gathers for the worship of God.

3 The word “sacrament” can be a helpful word if it is understood to mean, as Van A Harvey suggests, “a rite in which it is believed that God’s grace is uniquely active.” *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1964) 211.

4 Again, Paul tells the Corinthian church that he is glad that he did not baptize (m)any of them, because God had not sent him to baptize, but to preach the gospel. In that same context he asserts the mystery of numerical growth (“God gives the growth”) and the task of evangelism: planting seeds and watering them (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:9). When the entire Pauline corpus is put in view, Paul’s lack of concern for numbers is remarkable. As far as Paul was concerned, it seems that numerical methods of measurement used in order to determine whether or not a ministry or church was successful would be “to make a good showing in the flesh.” Indeed, it would be to view the growth of the Kingdom of God “from a human point of view.”

5 The anthropocentric element of worship, i.e. the focus on humanity for its repentance, would thus be given attention at the beginning of the corporate worship time, and then the focus and attention of the faith community could be turned to God, without any hidden agenda at work throughout the rest of the service.

6 J. J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965) 77.

7 von Allmen, *Worship*, p. 79.

8 See W. Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise: Doxology Against Ideology and Idolatry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) esp. ch. 1; and von Allmen, *Worship*, esp. p. 79. It would be tempting to expand this discussion of the way in which worship shapes the identity of the community, but that is not possible here.

9 As quoted by von Allmen, *Worship*, p. 79.

## Ordinary People, Extraordinary Things

*by Larry Sharp*  
*July – August, 1993*

I've seen it happen so many times over the past several years of ministry – it never gets old – it still moves me – it reminds me all over again that the good news is powerful. I'm speaking of course about conversion. Watching, participating, rejoicing in the decision of one who has chosen to follow Jesus. The reactions of the people in the audience amaze me. I've seen grown men cry tears of joy, I've witnessed families being united in Christ, I've seen marriages that have been changed – all because of Jesus and his power to heal.

I have stood in that pool of water with people from all walks of life and listened to them confess that Jesus is the Lord. I've watched as they are lowered into the water, deciding to die to a life of self and sin, and then seen them raised to walk in a brand new life. It gets to me every time. How can a God possibly be so merciful, so patient and so understanding? Why is he looking out for people like us? I always leave with a deeper feeling of gratitude and appreciation for what has happened. I hope I will never get over that.

Often it strikes me – the incredible hard work, sacrifice and effort that have been put forth to help bring one to Christ. Sometimes that gets lost in the midst of the celebration. And perhaps it should. After all, Jesus said, “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty”” (Luke 17:10). Paul reminded Christians in Corinth who were prone to giving too much credit to their favorite preachers, “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task, I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

But I am reminded of a mother who has prayed for her children to have faith. I remember parents who have faithfully served God and are now seeing their children respond to him. I've witnessed dozens of college students and young adults so full of life and potential come to Jesus. I've seen the tears of a Christian wife whose husband was just baptized after months of study.

In nearly every case someone or several someones have made great efforts to help. People rarely become Christians without the help of others. Perhaps that's why Jesus included the human element in his call to “go make disciples.” Jesus knew it would require people who were willing to care, love, sacrifice, give, and to open their hearts that others might live.

Paul reminded a young group of Christians in Thessalonica that his love for them was so real that he was “delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

Maybe we are missing that element today. Time has become a precious commodity. We are reluctant to share it. We know God's work needs to be done, but we hope the "hired help" will do it. It seems to me that Jesus' method of evangelism was that of investing his heart, his time, and his life in people. From the beginning to the end of his ministry, Jesus gave of himself sacrificially to teach people. Jesus invested precious time – something he did not have a lot of – that people might know God.

All of this challenges us to consider how we will invest our time. What part will evangelism or sharing our faith with others have in our busy lives? I don't need to remind many of you about all the demands on our time – it might be overwhelming to list them all! However, perhaps I should remind us that God would never ask us to do something we are unable to do. I have been convinced over the years that God continues to use ordinary men and women to accomplish extraordinary things for him. He has always used people "as they were going" to make disciples.

I am reminded of a bright young lady who had been invited to some of our college activities on campus. She was a new student and had experienced a difficult life. When she was only seven years old, her parents were killed in a car accident. Her older sister raised her and sent her off to college. In time, with efforts put forth by a number of the college women, she became a Christian. That in itself is a beautiful story, but it does not end there. She began to share her faith in Jesus and study the Bible with her boss at work (a semi-frightening, not to mention intimidating, experience for some of us!) This young lady in turn responded to Jesus and was baptized. The story does not end there either. "The boss" went home and shared the good news with her husband, and after months of study, he became a Christian too. What a change in their lives, in their marriage, what hope for their future! All because a young college girl became a Christian and because she was willing to tell what she knew to someone she loved. Maybe that's it – telling what you know about Jesus and his plan for life to someone you love! That same college girl went on a mission trip to Europe this past summer where she touched the hearts of dozens of European people. Only in eternity will we truly know all that God has done through her or through any of us. Did I mention that she is engaged to a wonderful Christian man and that they are beginning a new life together in the near future? Truly God is able to do more than we could ask or imagine.

I am also reminded of a wonderful couple nearing retirement age. They have given their lives in service to Jesus for many years. They have quite ordinary jobs, one as a postal worker, the other as a school-teacher. But over the years they have done some extraordinary things. They adopted five children who had extra special needs and raised them and one biological child to adulthood. They helped keep the church going through deeds of service they would be too modest for me to tell. These were acts of love, not duty. They have lived to see their dream come true – to see the church prosper and grow and reach people in their community. One family they helped reach is especially dear to me. The two women teach school together. In time, friendship, love, and mutual trust developed. One asked the other to begin a Bible study. But that was only part of the story – it is really a story about friendship – of one family loving, serving and caring for one another. In time – family ministry often takes lots of it – the husband and wife were baptized into Christ. You might understand why they have become one of the most loving and serving families in the church – they had a great role model. Incidentally, their oldest son was the first teen to become a Christian in our teen ministry!

Jesus envisioned that people who had received good news would spread that news to others. We have an opportunity to make a difference in the world and in the lives of others. Methods change, people of different generations change, but the good news remains constant. Christ has died for sinful men and women. People still need the blood of Jesus.

Maybe you are the ambassador Jesus is wanting to use. Maybe you will be the one to make a difference in your neighborhood, at your work place, in your school or your family. We, like the prophets, feel a deep sense of inadequacy. We wish God would choose someone else – someone more talented, knowledgeable, and more eloquent. Let us remind ourselves that God has always used ordinary people to do extraordinary things for him. May we have the resolve of Isaiah: “Here am I, send me,” that others might find a life that is truly life.

## Unforgiven, Unforgiving

by Bill Love

July – August, 1993

After this year's Academy Awards Clint Eastwood revealed his purpose in making the movie, *Unforgiven*. "I wanted to de-glamorize guns and killing," said the veteran Hollywood gunslinger. He did more than that; his film also broke the mold for movies in this familiar, old genre.

The formula western has the good guys in the white hats come to town, wipe out the bad guys wearing the black hats, and then ride away into the sunset as heroes. But in *Unforgiven* there are no white and black hats, only gray ones. Every person has mixed motives and a dark side. The story begins with a shocking injustice crying out to be set right. A cowboy draws his knife and permanently disfigures a prostitute for making fun of him. Her offense was punished a thousand times over. From that moment on a white-hot rage for revenge burns in the hearts of the other prostitutes. The offender would never, could never be forgiven. In their minds they are calling for nothing more than simple justice. But in the end something other than justice is served and there are no heroes. Gene Hackman, who played the brutal sheriff, commented that the story is surely more authentic and true to the old west as it really was than the stereotypical western.

It seems significant that the movie has been so popular. Reasons must include the strong story line and superb acting. But there may be something more to the public's approval and film's success on Awards' night. Could it be that it spoke powerfully to some deep need within the American soul? Eastwood commented that he had held the script since the mid-seventies and was fortunate that the timing of its release was just perfect in 1992. Perhaps the violence in the movie feels good to something deep inside us.

We Americans are an angry people, getting more angry all the time. Through no fault of our own, some of us have lost our jobs and others know that our jobs are on the line. Dangerous criminals are set free in early release programs. We are losing the war on drugs and violent war on our streets. Often we feel powerless to change the situation. We are caught off guard by the rage we feel when someone cuts us off in traffic, when our opinions are ignored, or when a competitor wins by ignoring the rules. Maybe the movie violence in *Unforgiven* feels good for those reasons. Many Americans may secretly enjoy the ending when William Money has the compromised sheriff down, takes a moment to decide whether to kill him, and then pulls the trigger. The point is not that we have been turned into brutal killers, we've just had enough. A vicarious release for our rage in a darkened theater is safer than many alternatives.

The movie also demonstrates a profound truth about human nature. It shows in a vivid way our incapacity, by our own power, simply to receive forgiveness and act out of that grace in forgiving others. The gunslinger and outlaw William Money was saved from his evil ways by the woman who would become his wife. "She saved me from my drinkin' and wickedness," he says of his dearly departed. He and his old crony speak of the days when they robbed and killed with abandon. Money says it again and again on the trail to Big Whiskey, "I ain't that way no more."

It is obviously true. Her love and his grateful resolve had made him a different man. Love and love alone has such power to change people.

Nevertheless, the “old man,” to use the apostle Paul’s phrase, finally returns to overwhelm Money. At the end of the story he goes far beyond serving justice, turning back to the mad-dog behavior of former years. Even the powerful memory of his wife’s love and his own will in response to her love does not restrain his dark side from revenge.

The bad news of the gospel is that people can’t transform themselves. Our popular self-help methods and slogans prove no match for the demons that live in the cellars of our souls. Most of the time, when the dungeon doors are shut and securely padlocked, we act rather civilized. But when some betrayal shatters the lock those demons can come forth in alarming brutality.

Nowhere is this truth seen more clearly than in our struggle to forgive. The Frisians were one of the ancient Teutonic tribes of Holland. They had a quaint custom of keeping a corpse around the house until the death of their loved one was revenged. We are more sophisticated. Have you heard someone talk about a divorce like this: “We have a civilized arrangement. We were friends before the mistaken marriage. There are no hard feelings, never have been. Now we’ve just gone back to the original friendship.” I hope I’m not within striking distance when that person finally vents the anger inside.

All of us have trouble forgiving. The best Christians struggle with the challenge. No matter how much we strive for holiness, we all have buttons which, when pushed, reveal the sinner within yet to be transformed. The love of Money’s wife was powerful, but it was not enough. As commendable as his resolve was it alone could not prevent his reversion to brutal revenge.

The good news of the gospel is that we are forgiven and granted power in Christ to learn forgiveness. Neither of these gifts comes cheap. Our forgiveness cost God his only son, cost Jesus his life. Our learning to forgive claims the surrender of our own arrogant pride. We are crucified with Christ. His crucifixion is God’s revelation of our self-centeredness. It also demonstrates God’s unspeakable love for us and gracious involvement with us. Nothing can break the stony, proud heart like an encounter with Jesus on the cross. In the deepest depth of his suffering Jesus asked the Father to honor his reason for coming: “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.”

We usually think the cure for ignorance is education. But the ignorance at the center of the human heart is morally corrupt, a willful blindness. William Money was full of denial that he was on the road back to his former self. The same kind of denial is seen in the Scribes and Pharisees, in Jesus’ own disciples, and in the general population at the cross. They would not see that their condition was so deplorable that God had to come and die a criminal’s death to redeem them. The same is true with us. The great boulder in the road between us and God is not our ignorance of religious data. Our selfish pride makes us resist repentance and forgiveness just as Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet.

Our forgiveness of others involves a similar crucifixion of pride. Something within must be crucified. Our legitimate legal claims for justice must be laid aside, our lust for revenge must be

denied, our competitive urges must be overcome. We must allow the healing oil of God's grace to bathe and soothe our feverish souls before we can forgive others.

The cross is not all, there is also resurrection. Jesus' open tomb shows us like nothing else God's victory of light over darkness, of life over death, and love over hate. The promises of Jesus to live with and in us are secured. The reformation of our lives does not ultimately depend upon the love of others for us or upon our own resolve. The love of William Money's wife was potent, but she was still dead. His own vows were genuine but not equal to the test. Christ was crucified to take our sin upon himself. He was raised to give us life, and through us, the gift of life to others who also need forgiveness.

## Dan Discovers a New Hermeneutic

*by Bo Whitaker*  
*July – August, 1993*

At the local junior high over half of the 800 kids eat in three shifts with reasonable decorum in the school cafeteria. The other half lines up outside under the covered patio at the snack bar. There, cynical ladies with white hose and sweaty mustaches push greasy, sweet and crunchy cuisine through its windows. Then, weather permitting, the junk food patrons munch, without reasonable decorum, around several picnic tables where the students from the cafeteria soon saunter out to wait for the bell which sends them all back to class. Those last few minutes of each lunch period produce a scene which can horrify the average adult: the clamor of hundreds of restless teenagers mingling among their own odious litter.

In this setting of pandemonium a singular adult wandered for years: Dan Waldorf, the math teacher, on patio duty. Daily he floated through the whirlpools of snacking adolescents and the offensive messes they deposited, scarcely aware of either. And the kids hardly noticed Dan as he ambled by, always whittling on a piece of wood and searching for pennies on the concrete floor of the patio. Some of the students claimed that “Ole Dan” could whittle during an earthquake. Sometimes a fight snapped him out of the pattern, but he always quietly broke it up and escorted the offenders to the principal’s office.

Most people around school considered Dan cold and detached, misunderstanding how he counted on dignity to save him. Dan remained aloof from the din of teaching in a public school. Stationed above a world that he patiently carved with honor, Dan dutifully moved through middle age, frequently stooping for pennies.

Dan – the teacher who whittled. He had adopted the craft to quit smoking. Thus, his hobby improved his social life. Sometimes people even broke the ice for him by asking such questions as, “Whatcha doin’?” or, “Are ya still cuttin’ on that same one?” Carving out the walnut figures – question makers, as he called them – occupied his compulsive fingers and restless spirit, in the therapeutic fashion of most hobbies.

He taught pre-algebra to eighth-graders, picked up loose pennies on the patio (twenty-eight dollars’ worth one year), devoured cheap science fiction novels, participated with little enthusiasm in church work and sang in the local community choir. Mostly, though, he just whittled. Growing up as a preacher’s son had made him a family man, but by the time his four kids left home, he felt a bit useless, so he worked on larger chunks of wood for awhile.

Although he regretted that people misunderstood his whittling, he never tried to explain. They attributed to him such qualities as patience, artistry, and drudgery. He had thought about the actual motivation for whittling: fear, excitement, love, and especially faith. Faith that the perfect figure buried in the heart of the wood could emerge one day. He even taught his students like that – vaguely believing in what they could become some day. But he never suspected that God

had been carefully sculpting him, chiseling for years at the hard block of his soul. Meanwhile, on the surface, the gusts of the years scattered his trail of splinters, shavings, and sawdust.

Then came a day in Dan's fifty-third year, a day of definition which altered him irrevocably. He patrolled his routine area on an icy Thursday in December. Most of the kids had stayed inside the cafeteria that day. He had found only one penny in thirty-five minutes, but that allowed him to direct extra attention to whittling the rounded body of a willow roadrunner. Ordinarily Dan avoided visual, verbal, or physical contact with the kids on the crowded patio, having the ability to stroll through the throng, alternating his focus between the wood in his hand and the concrete at his feet. Today, however, he collided roughly with a boy who dashed out the cafeteria door.

The impact spun Dan around, causing him to drop his whittling knife. The boy bounced headfirst into a steel I-beam column with a dull clang, and slumped to the concrete floor, dazed. Instinctively, Dan reached down for his knife and with the same motion turned to help the boy to his feet. Then, looking at the red, weeping, glazed eyes in the twisted face of the Hispanic youth, Dan froze. Bewildered, he heard the click of a switch-blade, saw its glint, felt cold steel slice into his arm, and glanced down at the line of blood coloring the rip in his jacket sleeve. Not until the boy cursed him in Spanish, though, did Dan react – savagely.

The first and last fight of his life seemed to Dan like a dream – his calm and dignified self watching helplessly as another strange, hostile self tried to destroy another human being.

Later, in the hospital, he heard that the boy had been expelled from high school a week earlier for doing drugs and had been on juvenile probation for months. That Thursday, he had come to the junior high school cafeteria under the influence of alcohol and hallucinogens to continue a feud with a gang of ninth-grade boys. Teachers in the cafeteria had prevented trouble and tried to hold him for questioning, but he had bolted out the door and stumbled onto the patio and into the life of Dan Waldorf.

Alone in his hospital room, Dan replayed the fight again and again, as though editing a film clip, hardly comprehending the 10 seconds of fury but sensing that they had somehow balanced his life – blessed it, even. He remembered that in his initial charge he impaled himself on the boy's switchblade, but in return had gashed the boy's face from ear to chin with the whittling blade. Recoiling from Dan's blind viciousness, the boy stepped back into a corner where Dan again advanced, slashing with abandon. By that time several male teachers had reached the scene to restrain Dan, who collapsed in their arms, saying, "Okay, okay ...I'm all right, now." The men relaxed their grips, took Dan's knife and turned toward the boy, but he dodged through them and sprinted across the patio into the parking lot, leaving a trail of red splashes and disappearing into an alley. Dan remembered leaning against the brick wall and watching the boy escape, noticing for the first time the blue jeans and jacket, white tennis shoes and the red bandanna he used to wear when he was a kid, playing Indians. A sharp pain stabbed into his chest, but he laughed as he looked down and saw that he still clutched the half-whittled roadrunner, now glistening with the blood that ran freely down his arm. He coughed and fainted.

The police arrested the boy on the afternoon of the fight at the emergency room of the hospital. They began the proceedings to send him to the state reformatory and the investigation cleared Dan of wrongdoing. But Dan knew better.

He knew that he'd taken a step beyond self-defense. The boy had been on drugs – Dan knew he had no excuse. During his first days in the Intensive Care Unit, Dan spent his conscious hours worrying – less about his physical condition than about the reasons for his irrational behavior that day on the patio. The plastic tent above him, the stitches and the tubes lacing in and out of him seemed trivial next to the demon that had surfaced within him. The kind reactions of family and friends brought no comfort. He had to confront the monster in his soul... alone. Drifting through levels of consciousness, driven by medicine and madness, Dan chased the source of himself, afraid of catching it. By the time he moved from ICU to a regular room, he knew more vulnerability than ever before, never having felt less human, but never being more so.

Then finally, struggling silently against his own fears, Dan reached weakly toward God. Confused and distorted, his prayers nevertheless rose from the heart. And Dan, who had read the Bible all his life, began to understand it as though reading it for the first time, leaning on it as he became acquainted with the stranger inside himself. In the cheap hospital bedside edition, Dan discovered emotion, passion, depth. Reading the stories of men and women who teetered over on the edge, between destruction and salvation, he gave sincere thanks. For the first time, he understood King David's anguished laments and his shouts of joy. Now Dan could comprehend David's dance of celebration through the streets and also his miserable prostration in the dust. And when Dan read again of Jesus in the garden, he wept into his hospital pillow – the first time in years that he had been able to cry.

He learned that he was created for passionate devotion and that the cool dignity he had trusted so long had led him to hell and deserted him there. Compared to the struggling, stumbling, aching people of Bible times, Dan saw his former self to be like one of his science fiction characters, without feeling, knowing neither love nor hate – lusting only for comfort. He saw his sin not as a murderous lack of control or impulsive hostility, but as failure to be fully human. His unreasoning rage, he saw, was the result of burying intensity too deeply inside.

Two weeks after a bloody fight with a stranger, tears of bitter regret brought Dan Waldorf to the most precious moment of his life. He longed to change, to start his personhood over.

Six weeks later, Dan resumed his regular duties at school, and for a while people watched him closely. Casual observers noticed he had lost weight and no longer whittled, but those who knew him best could see greater changes. Rather than search the ground for coins, he now looked straight into the eyes of people – and smiled.

## Hope Network Newsletter: Worthy

by Tim Curtis  
July – August, 1993

*NOTE: Rubel Shelly spoke boldly on the topic of “The Priority of Worship” at the Wineskins dinner during the “Church That Connects II” seminar in Dallas recently. He emphasized the need for worship to be the top priority in the life of the church. Noting that we sometimes put other noble causes before worship, Shelly clearly stated that other noble causes find more success and even more nobility following the priority of worship and not preempting it. I strongly suggest you order the tape and let church leaders and members ponder its merit. Order from Hope Network, 12801 N. Central Expressway, Suite 1560, Dallas, Texas 75243.*

The following article was submitted by Tim Curtis from Tallahassee, Florida. I read it soon after I heard Rubel’s address, and felt it was timely and relevant, making a case for the priority of worship in each of our lives. Thank you, Tim, for bringing worship close to home. Thank you, Rubel, for piercing hearts and pricking ears. And thank you, God, for revealing more of your mercy so we find new ways to worship, and the opportunity to keep moving the importance of worship back to the top of the list.

– Lynn Anderson, feature editor

After a few minutes at the table for our weekly lunch together, I could tell something wasn’t quite right. “You seem a little tired today, Mike. Feeling okay?”

“Yeah, sort of; well, not really.” Mike seemed to be entering that zone where you don’t really want to talk about something, but are glad that you can.

“There’s nothing wrong,” Mike said with a sheepish smile. “It’s just that I had the most bizarre dream last night, and I wasn’t able to go back to sleep for a long time. I’m starting to drag a little.”

“One of those dreams where you run in slow motion, or suddenly realize you’re standing in a crowded room with no clothes on?” I joked.

“No, not this time,” Mike said with a real smile. He was relaxed now and ready to tell me his story.

“I know this sounds strange, but I dreamed that I was an old man watching my own funeral. My life had gone on pretty much as I would like for it to. I had enjoyed good health, success in my job; Joyce and I remained close and all the kids turned out great.

“There were a lot of people at the funeral, and they sincerely were sad to see me gone. Friends from church had done just what I knew they would do, or will do someday. They were there for

my family, supporting them – I suppose inadequately – but really in the only way people can in those situation.”

As Mike paused while the waitress sat our drinks on the table and took our orders, I wondered where he was going with this. It is amazing how something so brief as a dream can sometimes drag into a long story as all of the sensations are described. But I was intrigued by what Mike had to say, and was glad when the waitress left and he was able to continue.

“I saw all of this for only a moment, because I found myself standing before God in what I somehow knew was the judgment scene. It was weird. I felt both afraid of what he would see as he reviewed my life, but at the same time comforted in his presence.

“He spoke to me, but I don’t remember hearing a voice. I guess I just knew the thoughts he wanted to share with me. I don’t think I’ll ever forget what I heard. He asked me, ‘Did you not bring anyone with you? I had hoped that you would.’”

I was glad Mike did not pause long enough for me to reply. What could I have said?

“I could tell he was disappointed,” Mike said. “He told me, ‘You were in that world for such a long time, as you count time. I brought so many people into your life that I was counting on you to tell about me. I love them too and want them to be with us. Why didn’t you tell them?’

“Dave, I never felt so alone in all my life. I couldn’t answer, all I could do was cry. But he knew the answer even before he asked the question.”

“Wow!” I interrupted. “No wonder you couldn’t sleep much after that. I can imagine how fearful it must be standing before God with such guilt.”

“No, you don’t understand,” Mike said as he leaned forward in his chair. “It wasn’t like that at all. He told me, again without speaking, to come in! I don’t remember any pearly gates or stuff like that, but I knew I was about to enter heaven. And as he took my hand he said, ‘My child, it is the mark of blood on your forehead that gains admittance for all who come into my world. Whether you come empty handed or accompanied by ten thousand others whose souls you have led to me, it doesn’t matter. Because of the blood, I forgive you of all your faults.’

“You see, Dave, I never was really afraid. But my heart felt like it had been sliced open.” I could see how much this meant to Mike when his eyes moistened.

“You know that description of God that Isaiah saw in his dream? Well, mine wasn’t exactly like that, but I felt the same kind of sensations. I can’t think of words strong enough to express it, but I could just feel his majesty and his glory.

“Dave, he deserved more. It’s like I had somehow diminished his pleasure; not his pleasure in me, but HIS pleasure; the thing he most enjoys, by not speaking to others about him. I had hurt him, and even though it was unintentional, I still felt his pain. He was just so awesome that I wanted to be able to increase his joy by pointing others to him. I wanted to be able to present him

with such a gift, but I had none. That feeling of disappointment is the last thing I remember before I woke up.”

Mike sat back in his chair, took a deep breath and said, “Strange, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” I replied.

Still a little intimidated, all I could think to say was, “What do you do now?”

“Well, this morning I was speaking with a guy in my office who recently separated from his wife. Neither he nor his wife are totally sure they want a divorce, but they don’t know how to live together either. I was surprised at how natural it was for me to ask him if he was a Christian, and if he thought that would make any difference in his life right now. I have always thought things like that, but was afraid to say anything for fear of driving people like him away. You know, you can go a whole lifetime and never consider the time to be ‘right.’ Well anyway, we talked some more, and he is going to have dinner with us Thursday night, and wants to know more about Jesus.”

Mike paused for only a moment, then said, “I haven’t thought this all the way through yet, but somehow worship seems to have a new meaning now.”

“Worship?” I interrupted, “I thought all of this was about evangelism.”

“That’s what I’m still working on,” Mike said. “It seems to me that the two can’t be separated, or at least shouldn’t be. Coming into the presence of God is…” he hesitated, searching for just the right words, “well, it’s the highest level a person can ever reach. How can we experience God’s majesty, like I did in my dream, and not be moved to share him with others? It seems to be the ultimate act of selfishness to keep him to ourselves. It’s like finding the cure for AIDS or some other horrible disease, but hoarding it to myself.”

Seeing his point, I added, “It may be selfishness, or it might be that a person has just never caught a glimpse of God. I know for a long time I seem to have been sitting through our worship services, but never even thinking much about God. You hear this expression a lot, but at times it really does seem like an empty ritual.”

“I know what you mean,” Mike said. “Empty ritual seldom affects us, much less our relationships with other people. But intimate contact with the Creator of the heavens and the earth gives us something that can’t be kept to ourselves. It doesn’t just give us a message; even more importantly, it gives us a flame.”

As the waitress returned with our meals, I was thankful for Mike’s dream and his sharing it with me. With some measure of reluctance, I said, “I think a lot of people are like me, deep down they really want a greater sense of the presence of God. It’s a little scary for me right now, but I think if this can happen with me, God will change me in some ways that don’t seem possible any other way. Maybe the reason that I, like you, have a hard time finding opportunities to talk to people about God is I don’t very often experience his majesty. Why don’t we talk to some of the folks at

church about this, the elders, song leaders, staff, someone. We need to find a way to help us focus on God more during our worship service.”

“Yeah, I think that would be a good thing,” Mike replied. “Although I have a feeling that what you and I bring to the worship experience, whether it’s at church on Sunday morning, or in our own quiet times, is probably the key. But you’re right. We need to make it easier for people to experience God in this way: If our worship service doesn’t do that, maybe we should stop calling it a worship service.”

## **AfterGlow: The Rescue Brigade**

*by Phillip Morrison  
July – August, 1993*

Theodore Wedel, of the Washington Cathedral in our nation's capital, used to tell an intriguing and disturbing modern parable about a lifesaving station.

Located on a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks occurred frequently, the station was housed in a crude hut and served by a handful of dedicated volunteers. With little thought for their own safety, these workers went out day and night, rescuing so many of the lost that their little station became famous.

Many people wanted to be associated with the now-famous and successful lifesaving station. As the number of volunteers grew, new boats were bought, new crews were trained, volunteers became members, and a new building was constructed. New furniture replaced the worn cots and shabby chairs, and the station became a popular and comfortable gathering place. Though lifesaving was still the stated purpose of the organization, and the lifesaving motif was prominent in the decorations, the members became less personally involved. Rationalizing that, after all, they were just inadequate volunteers, they hired some professional lifesaving crews to do their work.

When a large ship wrecked just off the coast, the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, dirty, half-drowned people. Some were sick from the arduous journey, and some had yellow and some brown skin. The beautiful new club was mud-caked and wet, and who knew what disease germs had been left by the shipwreck victims.

At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. A minority of the members insisted that the primary purpose of the group was lifesaving. But they were voted down and told they could begin their own lifesaving station just down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. "History continued to repeat itself, and today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!"

Evangelism...lifesaving... soulsaving... will never get done by people who spend all their time getting ready. Nor will it be done by people who keep searching for easy formulas and sure-fire methods. And it certainly won't be done by people who try to hire spiritual mercenaries to take their place.

The demon-possessed man healed by Jesus understandably wanted to follow his Savior. But Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:18-20). None of us will ever improve on that divine plan for the who, the how, and the why of evangelism.