

Wineskins Magazine

Clock Builders

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Clock Builders, Not Time Keepers

by Mike Cope

November, 1996 – March, 1997

In their best-selling book, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, James Collins and Jerry Porras ask readers to imagine a remarkable person who can look at the sun or stars and give the exact time and date, “It’s April 23, 1401, 2:36 A.M., and 12 seconds.” We would likely revere such a person. They’d be sought by everyone from Larry King to Rosie.

But Collins and Porras have a more significant person in mind as they evaluate the country’s greatest companies: the person who, instead of telling the time with precision, builds an accurate clock. How much more helpful this person would be, for they give something that will contribute to our lives after they’re dead and gone.

Some companies, they point out, manage to “tell the time” accurately a few times. They come out with the right software at the perfect moment. And, as a result, they make a ton of money. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they’re a great company. Next year they may guess the wrong time. Then they crash and burn. It happens all the time.

Great companies, Collins and Porras claim, are the ones with leaders who “build clocks.” They invest in building a company with a central purpose and core values. The greatest thing Sam Walton did wasn’t to amass a fortune for his original stockholders; it was to build a company. The most important accomplishment of Walt Disney wasn’t to produce an animated movie or to build a theme park; it was rather to invest in a company that would be strong after he died.

Churches today desperately need some clock-builders. They don’t just need “time tellers”—leaders who come up with a great idea for this year and then travel around the country telling others about their great idea. They need leaders who will invest their lives in helping them be strong at the core. But how is this done?

First, by prayer. Since we work in God’s church, we must ask him to refine us, correct us, indwell us, and bless us. How blessed a church is to have elders and ministers (and other men and women who are usually informal leaders) who spend time before God—whether together in meetings or alone in a closet—pleading with him to accomplish his purposes in our midst.

Last month at the church where I minister, one of our elders began each assembly with a long (long by our standards...about 10 minutes... not that I was counting!) prayer. He never once drew attention to himself. He adapted the language of a different psalm each week to the praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests of our church.

While we, formed as we are by rapid images of TV, often grew impatient, we were also changed. The most powerful work of any church often comes from unexpected and unrecognized sources: those, often the youngest and oldest members of the church, who spend time in prayer for the people of God.

Second, leaders become clock-builders when they help the church stay focused on its central purpose. We are to live to the glory of God. That's something no one else but God's church is going to do. It means we'll be people of prayer and praise, we'll be a counter-culture of gospel-defined character, we'll be a community of encouragement, we'll be an outpost of evangelism, and we'll be a body of servants.

And third, leaders become clock-builders when they continually encourage all members to use their spiritual gifts and passions. We believe in theory in "the priesthood of all believers," but we must invest our time and energy where our beliefs are. Rather than acting out of fear and high control, leaders must seek to liberate and inspire all Christ-followers to use their gifts to help the body of Christ grow and mature. Better than a leader who visits everyone in the hospital is a leader who equips others to use their gift of compassion to visit those who are sick. Better than a leader who holds a Bible study once a week is a leader who equips others to share the gospel by including them in the Bible studies.

Now, a warning. We tend to reward those who are time-tellers. They get most of the acclaim. They wow us with the speech they gave at a workshop; they impress us with the program they launched this year; they have just the right insight for this moment.

But of much more value is the clock-builder: the leader who is investing year after year in building a church to the glory of God.

The Jesus Way of Leadership

by Rubel Shelly

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Everyone knows how desperately we need effective leaders—in business, education, churches, and families. Yet many people who are cast in a leadership role and who want to function well have a hard time understanding how to get the job done. Whether shop manager, school teacher, committee member, parent, or elder, there are some common qualities to leadership that should be kept in mind.

The perfect model for each of these five qualities is Jesus Christ. As we lead—and a “leader” is anyone who exerts kingdom influence in any setting—our goal should be to incorporate these same traits in our lives. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct your life with these characteristics at work, with your family, and in your spiritual life. The impact will be immediate and helpful to all concerned. People will see Jesus in you, and his gentle presence will touch them through you.

Focus

Leaders know their mission and can articulate it. A vision of things as they could be moves them into the future with confidence and guides them in setting priorities. Their ability to concentrate on the heart of things allows them to keep both their own and others’ energy moving toward a target. Ask a real leader “What are the mission and goals here?” and there will be no sputtering for an answer. The leader’s first job is to be the trumpet that gives a clear and certain sound.

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). The specific goals to accomplish that mission had been agreed upon between him and the full godhead, were executed in relation to the two great commandments of biblical religion, and were communicated by both word and example to his followers.

Decisiveness

Because they are focused and know their priorities, leaders are decisive. They avoid being seduced by irrelevant or trivial matters for the simple reason that they know those things won’t achieve their goals. They refuse to run from difficult decisions and can take risks when necessary. Because they are anchored to strong principles, they do not stall themselves and their followers with indecision.

Some church leaders confuse being authoritarian (i.e., austere and inflexible) with being authoritative (i.e., positive and resolute). The former is much easier, for it refuses to allow people to grow to maturity at a pace the Holy Spirit sets and requires only that they conform to the prevailing consensus of human leaders.

Jesus repudiated the severe, uncharitable leadership styles of the world. Both for himself and those he calls to leadership from among his people, Jesus pledged leadership by gentleness,

service, and redemptive love (cf. Matthew 20:25-28). When the tones are strident and the judgments uncharitable, his pledge is being violated.

Credibility

Leaders know they must have the trust of those who are looking to them, so they prove themselves worthy to lead by acting with integrity. Leaders look in the mirror of personal accountability every morning. They ask no one to do things they are unwilling to do themselves. They are known for doing more than their share.

Insecure people are defensive of their position and power. They set about to manipulate others. They are not above trying to intimidate. Jesus, by contrast, was secure enough to take the servant's position without embarrassment. He washed feet, encouraged, and shielded his disciples from many of the consequences of their own immaturity (John 13:1ff; James 5:19-20).

Unselfishness

A true leader doesn't ask "What do I want from this?" but "What needs to be done here to get the desired outcome?" Although leaders will make the hard calls and take responsibility for their consequences, they draw from the wisdom of others and welcome feedback—especially from people with other points of view.

No one ever modeled unselfishness as Jesus did. "I am the gate for the sheep...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full...I am the good shepherd...I lay down my life for the sheep..." (John 10:7ff).

The best way to generate loyal fellowship is for leaders to exhibit genuine self-giving love on behalf of those under their influence. Harness the energies and talents of others. Don't resent or fear their capabilities.

Concern for People

Effective leaders are remembered less for their wise decisions and hard work than for their authentic interest in people. People working around them sense that they are valued, deemed worthy of trust, and judged capable of doing the job that needs doing. Leaders provide adequate resources and guidance. They encourage. Then they step back and let others function in their own personal styles.

Jesus set the highest standards and challenged his disciples to meet them. When they failed, he forgave and nurtured. Remember arrogant and self-assured Peter who failed so miserably? After his resurrection, Jesus sent word for Peter to meet him, re-commissioned him to his kingdom task, and looked confidently to his recovery from the debacle now behind him (John 21:15ff). How many compromised believers or fallen preachers could have been reclaimed by this sort of leadership in our churches!

My morning newspaper carried a sad story in January 1997. Nasir Philip Lual had immigrated to the United States to escape war-torn Sudan. He was shot and killed three steps away from his East Nashville front porch. He had fled to what he believed was a safe place—only to be murdered.

We must learn to lead “the Jesus way.” Especially in our churches, we must stop killing people who have fled Satan’s stronghold of darkness to look for a safe place in Christ. We must stop producing leaders who kill our weakest brothers and sisters with their authoritarian, self-serving, dogmatic, and harsh style.

It was only established, authoritarian religious leaders who were defensive of their personal position that Jesus condemned (cf. Matthew 23). For the rest of us, his style was so gentle that bruised reeds would not break under his touch and smoldering wicks would be able to give light again (cf. Matthew 11:15-21). Hallelujah! May God raise up more leaders among us who will follow his example!

The Jesus way is the only way for people of his kingdom.

The Power of the Powerless: Leading in His Presence

by Darryl Tippens

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Power is wonderful. Power drives the mighty engines of jumbo jets, lights the skies of New York, Caracas, and Tokyo. Power hurtles astronauts through space, drives my word processor, and speeds me to work in just minutes.

Power is deadly. Twisters and hurricanes level whole communities. Dresden, Hiroshima, and Pearl Harbor—50 years later—still bear the marks of the great bombs of World War II. Everyone knows the power of gunpowder, napalm, and atomic bombs. And many, too many, know something of the atrocities against the human spirit inflicted by a powerful, destructive, religious leadership. Souls brutalized and lacerated by raw power exercised in Jesus' name may in fact outnumber all the victims of all the world wars. And these casualties are worse, for, as Jesus teaches us, those who destroy the soul are far more deadly than those who kill the body.

It would be wonderful to be able to announce that abusive religious authority has ceased in our enlightened times; but, sadly, it is a continuing reality. Though we have put away the chains, the thumbscrews, and the stake, spiritual abuse is everywhere about us. In fact, it has always been this way. In Jesus' day there was profound misunderstanding about spiritual authority (see Matthew 20:10-28).

As Dostoevsky makes plain in his famous parable "The Grand Inquisitor," set during the Spanish Inquisition, Christian leaders have for 1,900 years been undermining Jesus' style of leadership. According to the aging Cardinal, the Grand Inquisitor, Jesus got spiritual leadership all wrong. He taught and acted as though human beings want freedom and responsibility. They do not, the Inquisitor explains. People want certainty, not freedom. People do not want to think, study, and pray for themselves. They want others to decide for them. Jesus overestimated mankind, and so the Cardinal tells Jesus: "We corrected your deed and based it on miracle, mystery, and authority" (257).

Dostoevsky's parable is chilling because the Cardinal openly states what many people think privately: the people in the pew, the common folk, are better off if they are "managed." If that requires a little coercion, well, it's for a "good cause."

And particularly disconcerting—this aggressive leadership always comes packed with its own impeccable logic. It seems so perfectly right, so efficient and effective. People who cast stones or chop off fingers (whether literally or figuratively) always do so with a kind of virginal sincerity. If a few people get hurt along the way, well, as friends of the Grand Inquisitor knew, long before Comrade Stalin, "You have to break a few eggs if you are going to make an omelet."

But as Alyosha argues in Dostoevsky's parable, there is another style of Christian leadership. Fortunately, we can see this other style today in the men and women who do not lord it over others, but who serve in kindness, gentleness, compassion, and humility. For years I have been

nurtured by strong, caring, non-coercive spiritual guides, and I serve with a body of shepherds known for their gentle shepherding. How did these caring, redemptive leaders resist the temptation to become Junior Inquisitors like Dostoevsky's Cardinal?

As He Is, So Are We in the World

Shepherds of the flock need not turn into Grand Inquisitors. One primary check on the abuse of spiritual power John calls "the original commandment" or "the commandment we have heard from the beginning." It is loving as Jesus loved. It is most significant that John's First Epistle, one of the greatest discussions of love in the New Testament, also contains one of the fullest explanations of what has come to be known as *imitatio Christi*, the "imitation of Christ." John says that love is the central, defining characteristic of God and Jesus. John further asserts that it is even possible for Jesus' followers to embody the same love that Jesus practiced.

Perhaps the central verse in the New Testament concerning spiritual leadership is 1 John 4:17: "**As he is, so are we in this world.**" The church's failure to remember these words has scorched the earth, producing countless persecutions, pogroms, and inquisitions in the last 1,500 years. These nine words, if truly believed, would vastly alter the church's behavior and thereby revolutionize how non-Christians view the church.

How could we ever have forgotten anything so simple, so important? "A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher" (Luke 6:4). In these words reside the blueprints for the Christian's unique ethical behavior. In the life of Jesus, we discover the template for our lives:

- God is love; therefore, we will love (1 John 4:11; 4:19).
- There is no fear in God; therefore, there is to be no fear in us (4:18).
- Jesus is righteous; therefore, we will do what is right (3:7).
- Jesus laid his life down for others; therefore, so we will lay down our lives for others (3:16).

Such discoveries change—radically and forevermore—how we treat our fellow creatures: "*For we realize that our life in this world is actually his life [God's life!] lived in us*" (1 John 4:19, Phillips). Of course, we don't achieve this high ground easily. Left to our own devices, spiritual leaders naturally degenerate into inquisitors. What are the checks upon the abuse of spiritual power? Consider two principles. Let us call them the principle of presence and the principle of possession.

The Principle of Presence

The principle of presence may sound odd in the ears of contemporary, rational human beings, but it was a truism in the ancient world. Simply stated: *You become like whatever you gaze upon.* There were quaint, mythological versions of this ancient idea. For example, many primitive people guarded their pregnant wives' eyes, for they believed that what expectant mothers looked at could deform the fetus. In the myth of Gorgon, three sisters' glaring eyes could turn the beholder into stone. "To gorgonize" means to stupefy or petrify a person with one's eyes. Then there was the basilisk, the legendary reptile whose stare was fatal.

Old myths are often extended metaphors expressing spiritual or psychological truths. In this case, the ancients were seeking a way to convey the truth that what we focus our hearts on changes us. What we surround ourselves with alters us slowly but surely over time. *What we watch we become.*

There's a positive side to this way of understanding. When you gaze upon something beautiful, holy, and good, you are not only uplifted morally and spiritually. You are changed. If you live in the presence of Jesus, you become like him. Since the ultimate mission of the Christian is to look like Jesus, the New Testament emphasizes the need to look at Jesus and live in his presence.

“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (1 John 3:2). (See also Philippians 2:5-11; 3:10-11; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 4:11; 1 John 4:17; Ephesians 4:32-5:2; Romans 15:1-7, etc.)

To say it differently, you don't become like Jesus solely by living in the presence of rules, creeds, and laws. You become like him by living in his real presence. Bad spiritual leaders simply have not spent enough time with Jesus.

The National Gallery in Washington, D. C., recently featured an exhibit of some of the greatest paintings by the seventeenth-century French master Georges de La Tour. The “authorship” of some of La Tour's paintings, however, is in doubt. Some of the master painter's followers are so accomplished that art historians cannot tell for sure, in some cases, which works belong to the master and which belong to the proteges of La Tour.

Similarly, the works of our Master live on in the hands of his adept painter-disciples who have observed their Master at work. As apprentices, we have watched him at his craft, and so have been purified, and have acquired his “techniques” for living in the world. Our acts of mercy and love look like his acts. Indeed, our deeds become his own, fusing into one glorious panorama of God's work in the world (Matthew 25).

The Principle of Possession

The New Testament envisions a second way in which we become like Jesus. We are “possessed” by him. Possession has two dimensions: it can mean ownership—holding something as property. (I own my car, my books, my computer, and so forth.) In a similar sense, we are owned by God. We were bought with a price, and have become his willing slaves. As good slaves, we enact the will of our Master. His will and ours become fused.

But we are “possessed” in a deeper, more mysterious sense. We are possessed by God in the sense that we are inhabited by him. If I take possession of a house, I not only hold title to it; I also dwell in it. Christians are houses indwelt by God: “For we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us!” Amazing! Christ abides in us through his Holy Spirit, and this possession completely alters the “structure”—us. We begin to speak like, sound like, act like the Spirit that lives within.

Ancient Christians knew spirits lived inside people. The only question was, *which spirits*. The New Testament writers teach that the Spirit has taken up residence within us for a purpose—to shape us into the holy image of Jesus and to pour love into our hearts that spills out onto the whole world. This holy charity in us is the beginning and the ending of Christian motivation: “*His love has the first and last word in everything we do...* The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:14, The Message, *Phillips*).

The Grand Inquisitors Among Us

A tragedy in the Restoration Movement has been our forgetting the great principle of *imitatio Christi*: “As he is, so are we in this world.” Strangely, many well-meaning Christians have marginalized Jesus, preferring doctrinal formulations and outlines of God over the vision of God himself. For many, immersion in the Gospels for purposes of personal spiritual formation is an unknown practice. The consequences to spiritual leadership have been devastating.

Reuel Lemmons used to say that we have always had “secret admirers” of the Inquisition among us. When you read Dostoevsky’s “Grand Inquisitor,” you realize this brilliant writer knew exactly what happens to church leaders when they abandon Jesus as their guide and goal. Without Jesus as their template, they not only destroy souls, they do it with an innocent enthusiasm. Pascal, centuries ago, saw the horror inflicted by zealots: “Never does one do evil so fully and so gaily as when one does it as a matter of conscience” (#895).

Forgetting that Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness, we stop trusting people, and start managing them; we dictate truth rather than search for it; we turn the church into an anthill where iron conformity rules; we stoke the fires that burn our enemies to the greater glory of God. At night we sleep, like the Grand Inquisitor, confident that we have done the right thing.

How do we escape bad spiritual leadership? Only Jesus can save us from games of power and manipulation. Only by spending lots of time in the presence of Jesus, only by being possessed by his Spirit, can we hope to avoid becoming junior Grand Inquisitors ourselves. Only Jesus can teach us spiritual leadership that is bold but gentle: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Matthew 12:20).

The Write Side: Decision Time at the Plainfield Motel

by Thom Lemmons

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Panic stabbed at his midsection just as the beam from his headlights picked up the city limit sign. He had forgotten the reports he needed to make tomorrow's presentation! Yanking the car onto the shoulder of the two-lane blacktop, he whirled about and tugged his briefcase out of the back seat. He thumbed the latches and scrabbled through its contents in the dim glow of the dome light until he found a folder marked "Projections—T. Landon." Heaving a sigh of relief, he snapped the briefcase shut and pulled back onto the highway.

It was Thursday, so this must be Plainfield, he thought. When you're on the road five and sometimes six nights a week, all the towns start to look alike: one not-so-major highway crossing another with a few houses and businesses huddling for comfort near the intersection.

Like most small towns in west Texas, Plainfield boasted a court house, a football stadium and a Dairy Queen. And a single decent motel which was why he made this town the terminus of his Thursday route.

He saw the motel sign just ahead. Along with a truck stop and the inevitable handful of convenience stores, the motel had one of the few signs still lit in Plainfield at this hour of the night. He rubbed his eyes. It had been a long day. But then, lately, all his days seemed long.

He sighed. With any luck at all, tomorrow's presentation would go well; he'd be able to convince the auto parts store that the cost savings generated by his computer system would justify the five-figure price tag. If he could put this deal to bed, the month would look pretty decent.

Goodness knew he needed a good month, after the last one. The brass hadn't exactly said anything, but he knew the guys in the other territories were closing the lead he'd opened on them earlier in the year. Not only that, but Karen had told him during last night's phone call that the dentist said Bethany was going to need braces. Then there were the lease payments on the Suburban, and the costs for daycare, and tuition payments to Westside Christian Academy, and....

He rubbed his eyes again. The tendons in his shoulders twisted another notch tighter as he drove into town.

The waitress brandished the coffee pot and aimed a questioning look at her. She nodded quickly, then resumed her study of the stained Formica counter top on which her elbows rested. Without conscious thought, she added artificial sweetener to the freshly poured coffee and swished the spoon listlessly about in the cup.

How could that creep do this to her? And why? She had been the dutiful wife, hadn't she? Even though she made more money than he did, she had agreed to move so he could take the

managership his company had offered. Sure, it meant she had to travel more, but she thought their marriage was worth it. Nor did she complain when he spent all day Saturday and most of Sunday on the golf course. "I'm making contacts at the country club," he'd told her. "It's important to my business." Fine. After all, he needed some recreation. He worked hard—no doubt of that.

It began to bother her that they didn't talk much. Before the wedding, such thoughts never crossed her mind. In fact, he told her once that he liked the fact that he didn't feel pressured to entertain her or make chit-chat. She thought it was a compliment. But as their marriage entered its second year, she wondered if she'd made the right inference.

Not only did he not feel obliged to entertain her, it seemed he didn't feel obliged to acknowledge her existence, much of the time. This didn't feel to her like the familiar, companionable silence of well-accustomed friends. This felt like the silence of two strangers seated face to face at an airport.

And then, two months ago, the bombshell: he moved out. No, there wasn't anyone else, he told her. He thought their lives were going in two different directions, that's all, and it would be better this way. Just like that. Adios, baby—no hard feelings, huh? Don't forget to forward my *Sports Illustrated*. Have your lawyer call mine and we'll do lunch.

How can that creep do this to me? She asked herself, sipping at the tasteless coffee.

He pulled into the covered drive in front of the small motel office and switched off the engine. Thumbing the headlights and the electric door lock, he got out of the car and leaned against the glass door of the office. Going inside, he could smell stale cigarette smoke and hear the muted clink of silverware and coffee cups in the motel diner. "Hi, Betty," he greeted the middle-aged, tired-looking night clerk. "Lo," she returned, placing the registration card, a pen and a room key on the counter. "Must be Thursday night," she said, as she did each time he came here.

"Yeah, I guess," he grinned halfheartedly, completing the ritual. Quickly he filled out the registration card and scooped the room key into his pocket. "Say, Betty, how late does the diner stay open? I didn't get a chance to eat."

"Open till midnight," Betty shrugged, "or whenever the folks stop showin' up, whichever's earlier." She glanced at the rattling electric wall clock. "Not but 10:15, and they're pretty busy tonight. You got plenty of time."

"Okay, thanks."

"You bet," she replied, turning back to her Reader's Digest.

He pulled around behind the motel, located his room—thankfully on the ground floor this week—and went inside. He tossed his briefcase on the bed, switched on the air-conditioning unit, and hung his garment bag on the wall bracket beside the sink. Pulling the door shut behind him, he headed toward the diner.

Her head was down, studying the bottom of her coffee cup, so she didn't see him come in. She didn't notice him until he spoke to her.

"Uh, ma'am? Excuse me, but can I sit here?"

With some difficulty, she forced her attention back to the present. "Pardon me?" she said, raising her head to find the source of the question.

The eyes looking back at her were deep green, set in a lean, attractive face. His collar was loosened, his tie the proper width and design to be stylish. He looked tired, and she knew that he was a few years older than she was. She glanced around the room, then back at him.

"All the other seats are taken," he explained with a weary wave, "and this is the only one left. Are you waiting for somebody?" he asked, motioning toward the empty stool to her left.

She gave a harsh little laugh. "Not by a long shot. Have a seat."

He sat down and attracted the attention of a waitress. "Bring me a glass of iced tea and a grilled cheese sandwich, please." The waitress made a few quick marks on her pad and whirled away.

"Thanks," he said, turning back to her. "I just got in, and I was running so far behind I didn't get to eat yet."

"Don't mention it," she shrugged, and looked away.

As he sipped his tea and waited for the sandwich to arrive, he stole glances at her from the corner of his eye. She was obviously a professional person, judging by her dress. His guess was she was traveling on business, much like himself. Odd that he hadn't run into her before.

She sipped at her coffee without looking up, occasionally stirring a few strokes with her spoon. Her elbows were on the counter, and her head hung low between her shoulders. He could understand that anybody from anywhere else who was spending Thursday evening in Plainfield was going to be tired. From her looks, he guessed she was like him—someone who was willing to get out and hustle, to do whatever it took to get where she wanted to go. Why else would a nice-looking young woman be in Plainfield on a Thursday night—alone?

"Here you go." He looked up. The waitress was plopping his sandwich down in front of him.

"Oh. Thanks."

"You bet.

Want some more coffee, Hon?" she continued, pointing toward the woman's near-empty cup.

"Uhh... Yeah, sure. Go ahead," she said, pushing the cup toward the waitress.

By degrees, she again became aware of him, sitting on her left and quietly consuming his sandwich. When she knew he wasn't looking, she studied him from the corner of her eye. Polite. Quiet. Tired. Probably spent all day on the road, just as she had. She found herself wondering about him: Where was he from? What was his life like? Had he ever bulldozed a marriage? Unaccountably, she found herself wanting to strike up a conversation with him. Perhaps it was the darkness inside her, longing for a little glimmer of light—however artificial and fleeting. Perhaps the loneliness was reaching critical mass. Or maybe she was looking for a way out. Out of where? She wondered briefly, as she opened her mouth to speak.

“Pretty exciting place on Thursday night, huh?”

He glanced at her, smiled apologetically and held up a finger as he finished chewing and swallowed. “Yeah, I guess so. You and I must have the same travel agent.”

She chuckled and nodded as she took another sip of coffee. “Well, this is the only place in this part of my territory where you don't have to bring your own light bulbs. I'm usually here on Wednesday, but this week we've been closing some deals, so I had to juggle my schedule a little bit.”

Just as he thought! A fellow salesperson! He thought of handing her a business card, but for some reason hesitated. “Where you out of?” he asked instead.

“Lubbock. You?”

“Fort Worth.” His eyes held hers for the merest moment, then he looked away, taking another bite of his sandwich.

What's going on here?

He wondered. He was far from unwilling to talk to her—and that worried him, just a little. There was something extra behind the words, the glances. Something that made him nervous—or excited. He wasn't sure which, and maybe that was what was bugging him. She wanted to talk. Did he want to listen? And if he did, what else did he want to do? This wasn't about quotas or sales projections or prospect lists. Or about braces, tuition and household expenses. This was the unknown, the untried. This was something different. Was it escape?

“So—who are you with, there in Lubbock?”

Her eyes flickered over his face, then away. He felt his chest tighten ever so slightly.

“I'm with the Lomax Corporation. We sell...”

“...business application software,” he interrupted. “I'm with EBN.”

“Oh, yeah!” she grinned. “We co-opped with you guys on several deals last year.”

“Course our national account guys got all the best plays, like always,” he grouched.

“Same here,” she agreed. There was a silence.

“I hope there aren’t any loud jerks in the room next to mine, like last time,” she said, finally.

There. It was out. The implicit next question lay on the counter between them, waiting to be picked up. She wasn’t sure why she’d made the invitation, and wasn’t sure she wanted him to accept. But for some reason, even the conversation of a stranger seemed better tonight than the familiar, heartbreaking silence of the last two months. And an embrace—any embrace—seemed preferable to the unanswered solitude which had been her only companion in all that time. Her life was already hell. Why shouldn’t she take a little comfort where she could find it? He didn’t even have to know her name...

His mind froze, then raced off in a hundred directions at once. He knew the next move. She’d made it so simple. All he had to do was casually ask, “Which room they got you in?”

The rest would follow, like water down a drain.

He had a sudden sense of teetering on the edge of a knife. On one side was the familiar drudgery of the known world. On the other was... what? Ecstasy? Adventure? The thrill of the mysterious?

Or just another lonely human being, looking for a quick fix?

He took a slow drink of iced tea, emptying his glass, then set it down and stared thoughtfully at it for several seconds.

“Well, it seems pretty quiet here tonight,” he said, at last.

She nodded, looking down at her coffee cup. “Yeah, I guess so.”

“I gotta give a presentation in the morning. I guess I better get outta here.”

She gave him a quick smile as he rose to leave. “Good talking to you,” she said, still not sure whether she was disappointed or relieved. “Knock ‘em dead tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” he said, tossing two quarters onto the counter beside his empty plate. “You take care.”

“Oh, I will.” She turned back to her half-empty coffee cup. She didn’t look around as he made his way toward the cash register.

He didn’t look back as he paid and left.

Movie Review: The Spitfire Grill

Reviewed by Katie Hays

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Go see this movie. Go alone or take your best friend; pick up your spouse or your date and any kids who are old enough to understand the wounding and healing of souls; but whatever you do, *go see this* movie.

While you're waiting in line to buy your ticket, read the rest of this article to get some hints, but not too many details, about the miracles you're going to witness on the screen. In no particular order, here are a few of the ones I've identified:

Miracle Number One: *You are about to see a collaboration between devout Christians and*

Hollywood. *The Spitfire Grill* was funded by the Sacred Heart League, the fundraising arm of an order of Catholic priests that builds schools and helps the poor in Mississippi. In a creative attempt to raise money for the League's projects, the priests decided to finance a movie that would be "undergirded with Judeo-Christian values," says League Director Roger Courts, but not overly religious.¹

Christians and Hollywood don't usually get along well. Historically, the Catholic Church made trouble for filmmakers through its watchdog group, the Legion of Decency. The Legion of Decency wielded so much power among moviegoers in the 1930s and '40s that studios actually let the church censor movies before they were released.² More recently, conservative politicians and conservative Christians alike have decried the corruption of our morals by what passes for "entertainment" on the big screen.

But wouldn't it be interesting, thought the Sacred Heart priests, to put their energy and money behind a film that they could say *positive* things about? Rather than constantly updating the list of movies that are filled with sex and violence, and urging people not to see films that glamorize a culture of indifference and moral ambiguity, what if Christian money was used to make a movie that "affirmed the human spirit"? Would, or could, anyone in Hollywood make such a movie? And, equally important for the Sacred Heart League, would anyone pay to see it?

Miraculously, the answer to these questions was "Yes." Enter Lee David Zlotoff, the creator of *MacGuyver*, the television series about a secret agent who never uses gun. He took the challenge to make a low-budget film with only one big-name star (Ellen Burstyn), without sex or violence or any of the other cheap tricks typically used to grab audiences, and to make it a truly beautiful story of love and redemption. And when the film was shown to great critical acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, Castle Rock Entertainment paid \$10 million for the rights to distribute *The Spitfire Grill*. This is a huge sum for such a "small" movie, giving The Sacred Heart League the profit it needed to build a new school in rural Mississippi.

Miracle Number Two:

You are about to see the most subtle evangelism, the good news offered simply and beautifully, and it will work on your heart. *The Spitfire Grill* is a story about a whole town full of people in need of confession, forgiveness, and healing. When a quiet, reflective woman named Percy (short for Perchance) with a gossip-worthy past comes to Gilead for a chance to start over, she finds that her past sins are interfering with the present. Her newfound friends and enemies in Gilead force her to face those mistakes and find her best self buried deep inside the pain. In her desperate search for healing, Percy unwittingly exposes the wounds of those around her, and we are astounded to find our own spiritual wounds opened by her achingly honest confession of brokenness.

The good news is, “There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.” The medicinal quality of the tree bark in local forests is nothing compared to the salve of selfless love as relationships develop between Percy and her employer, Hannah; a young woman named Shelby who comes to believe in Percy’s innocence; and an isolated forest dweller who unexpectedly connects with Percy. Shelby tells Percy that the town’s church building is empty now because they can no longer afford a minister. “I’m the only one who comes here anymore,” she says. “It’s quiet and you can think. If you ever want to come here, I wouldn’t mind.” Not your typical evangelistic strategy, but a genuine offer nonetheless of the peace of mind that the church offers to those who are hurting. And Percy takes her up on the offer.

In Gilead, Percy learns that to find her life she must lose it; she must offer herself on behalf of those who are weaker than herself. More importantly, she teaches all who witness her short stay in Gilead that same lesson, both the characters in the movie and those of us who are privileged to see it on the screen.

Miracle Number Three:

You are about to see a movie mainly about women who are strong, intelligent, and beautiful on the inside. Hannah, Shelby, and Percy are not going to dazzle you with their wardrobes. No one is going to copy their hairstyles. The makeup artist for this film didn’t have much work to do. But their beauty radiates from the screen, through their courageous voices and their piercingly honest eyes. All these women have been hurt, and the pain shows on their faces and in their bodies, but as their wounds heal, their heads come up and smiles return to their faces. There is no guile, no mean-spiritedness, no hate in their hearts, and so they are beautiful.

Their strength is born out of compassion for other human beings. Far from being naïve or sentimental, these women use their capacity for empathy to build strong bonds to one another. They help each other discard fear and bitterness, picking up courage and hope instead.

And the men in the movie? No stereotypes here, please. As Gilead’s men observe Percy and the changes at the Spitfire Grill, they have a variety of responses. Some are puzzled; some are angered; at least one is enchanted. The point is, no one in Gilead can ignore what’s happening, whether man, woman, or child. And a person’s response to those changes has nothing to do with gender or other outward characteristics, everything to do with the inward state of the heart.

Miracle Number Four: *You are about to see a movie that you can recommend to your friends, your parents,*

your older children, and your church without any reservations. How often do you start to recommend a movie to friends and find yourself stammering, “Well, there is this one scene...and you have to ignore the language...and...oh, never mind?” *The Spitfire Grill* does not require caveats, other than the following:

This movie is rated PG-13. The rating is undoubtedly connected to the mature themes of the story. A story about forgiveness requires a recollection of sin (always verbal, never graphic or offensive in the least). A story about healing requires a description of the wounds (again told as personal memories, sensitively done). And wounded people tend to lash out at others with angry words and hurtful accusations.

Young children may not understand this movie or appreciate its point. But anyone who is old enough to know how miserably sin hurts, and how soothingly forgiveness heals, should be allowed to see *The Spitfire Grill*. The conversations afterward will make taking your older children worthwhile.

So just in case you’re not in line at the box office yet, let me repeat: Celebrate the miracles that have come to the big screen in *The Spitfire Grill*. Go see this movie!

¹ Reported in an interview with Pat Dowell on National Public Radio’s Morning Edition, September 5,

1996. Transcript by Journal Graphics.

² Frank Walsh’s new book, *Sin and Censorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

1996), traces the Catholic Church’s influence in American movie making. *Sin and Censorship* is reviewed by Henry Herx in

Christian Century, August 28-September 4, 1996, pp. 821-22.

Jimmy Carter's Living Faith

by Grant Rampy

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Former President Jimmy Carter has recently been on a nationwide tour promoting his eleventh book, *Living Faith*. St. Louis-based journalist Grant Rampy interviewed Carter following a book signing event near St. Louis and prepared this article for *Wineskins*.

He has negotiated treaties... and taught Sunday School. He has managed a country...and a peanut farm. He has led a nation... and, by his own count, led 140 souls to Christ.

To meet Jimmy Carter is to be faced with a man who is a jumble of seeming contradictions. He is empowered by the gravity of the office he once held, yet never too busy to speak to a stranger. He leans forward in conversation, as willing to listen as to be heard. Maybe more so.

It is with a humility rarely seen in modern discourse—and even more rarely in powerful world leaders—that Carter approached his latest endeavor. *Living Faith* is one man's attempt to communicate the importance of personal faith by acknowledging how his faith has guided him through life's challenges—the challenges of marriage, fatherhood, and the presidency.

“Religious faith has always been at the core of my existence,” Carter writes. “It has been a changing and evolving experience, beginning when I was a child of three, memorizing Bible verses in Sunday school. My faith was first simple and unequivocal; there was no doubt in my mind about the truth of what I learned in church.”

Youthful determination, however, gave way to uncertainty, even skepticism. But these doubts, Carter stressed in our conversation, never eroded his faith. The questioning he did was merely his way of strengthening and testing his faith as it grew.

Today Carter wonders, “How do we bring ourselves to be courageous enough to look at our own lives frankly? To say, ‘What am I? How does my life measure up in the eyes of God? How accurately does my life mirror the example set by Jesus Christ?’”

At age 72, our 39th president doesn't claim to have all the answers. He frets about sounding “preachy.” Not to worry, both in person and on paper, Carter's tone is not that of an expert but of a fellow student who has learned something new that must be shared.

“I think a lot of folks are searching for something that doesn't change, that has a permanent value—something that is decent and moral, that can give us a transcendent life.” Carter has clearly found the transcendence others are still seeking.

In this increasingly materialistic world, Carter says people are being fooled into putting too much value on things that can be seen and touched. He quotes the Apostle Paul: “We look not at what

can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Carter says that he has been sustained by that verse as he has remembered it during the more trying times in his life. “Can we see truth, justice, forgiveness, or love? Those are the truly valuable things about which Jesus taught.”

Now, at a time when many would say he’s earned the right to slow down, Carter is in almost constant motion. News reports often show him in work clothes, helping to build another Habitat for Humanity house. Most Sundays find him back home in Plains, Georgia, teaching a Bible class at the Baptist Church he has attended most of his life. Carter estimates that he has taught 1,300 Bible classes in his lifetime, some in Spanish when he has toured Latin American countries.

It may be easy to assume Carter’s day as a political force has passed; his resurgent popularity has, after all, been due more to his work outside rather than inside politics. But Carter says he still has some things he hopes Washington will hear.

“Americans are disillusioned with the political environment and government, with the prevalence of negative advertising and constant squabbles,” he says. “Things are much worse now, there’s no doubt about that.”

Carter says it’s high time for political reform. “Look at the negative campaigning. When I ran against incumbent President Gerald Ford or when Governor Ronald Reagan ran against me, we would never have dreamed of referring to each other as anything other than ‘my distinguished opponent.’ And, if I had tried to tear down their character by making allegations against them, it would have been politically suicidal.”

Returning to an earlier theme, Carter says that Americans are known around the world for addressing issues like peace, justice, human rights, and the alleviation of suffering. They are issues the former president says people of faith aren’t doing enough to either combat or promote.

“Politicians are far more aggressive and effective than average church members who never really get to know a poor person. They never go to the homes of the poor, or have a cup of coffee with them, or learn the names of their kids, or invite them to their homes.” Politicians, he says, still have to do those things because the vote-getting process demands it.

Carter does believe that Christians are changing their attitude and behavior. They are seizing opportunities to pick up where government can’t or won’t. “I think there is a genuine effort, and not just on the part of individuals, to do something that’s transcendent, inspirational, gratifying, worthy, and unselfish. I believe I see evidence that groups of believers also want to do something that is good and decent. Overall, I think the trend is good.”

Good and decent: two words that come to mind for many of us when we hear Jimmy Carter’s name. But this former president, governor, and farmer is quick to remind admirers that he has

faced very real disappointments, embarrassments, and tragedies—and survived—thanks to his living faith.

Ministry Whenever, Wherever, by Whomever

by David W. Wray

November, 1996 – March, 1997

Church volunteers, according to Wayne Pohl, are leaner, meaner Christians who expect to be equipped for ministry and who expect to find significance. With a low tolerance for sitting on committees, church members today are a temp workforce that commits to projects rather than institutions.¹ These realities, along with many others, are producing an organizational revolution in congregations as they reconfigure ministry structures and strategies.

The Apostle Paul furnished church leaders with the theological principle for ministry long before contemporary administrative specialists began penning words about the issue. [Ephesians 4:11-16](#) provides a clear mandate for church leaders to equip (prepare) Christians for *works of service*, and in so doing, the body of Christ will mature and awaken to spiritual vitality. Thankfully, preachers and writers have long acknowledged the vision and mission articulated in this passage; however, Bill Easum recently provided a fresh perspective on equipping when he wrote about permission-giving churches.²

Before examining Eastum's principles of permission-giving churches, there are some bedrock tenets which should be acknowledged. Permission-giving churches recognize that all Christians in congregations are spiritually gifted individuals who are ministers. As ministers they have significant ownership in every aspect of the congregation's life. Quickly abating are the days when church members are satisfied by only hiring professional staff to establish numerous programs and then filling the various roles with volunteers, some reluctant and other enthusiastic. Instead, Steens and Collins suggest that current ministry philosophy includes empowerment, integration, servant-leadership, interdependence, and member-mobilization.³ It should be apparent to church leaders that congregational structures in the twenty-first century will be less about control and more about permission-giving.

Control environments provide a neat, hierarchical organizational structure. Permission-giving contexts can be messy as Christians struggle to facilitate ministry while working toward accomplishing their agreed-on mission. Control settings have clear authority and communication channels which demand close coordination, procedures and management. Permission-giving milieus tend to flatten organizational structures, and, while various individuals have specific spiritual functions (elders, staff members, deacons, ministry leaders, etc.), the roles are more relational than organizational. Easum, using these precepts, renders numerous principles of permission-giving churches.

Principle One: *Permission-giving churches believe that the role of God's people is to minister to people, in the world, every day of the week, by living out their spiritual gifts instead of running the church by sitting on committees and making decisions about what can or cannot be done.*

One congregation, in attempting to put this principle into practice, created a Ministry of Care. Helping professionals (physicians, optometrists, attorneys, therapists, dentists, etc.) in the church

were asked if they would provide care for any member of the congregation who couldn't pay for their services. Without exception each helping professional joyfully said yes. They went on to say, "It is difficult to leave our practices and come to the church building to participate in a ministry program. Thank you for providing ministry opportunities and recognizing that we are daily using our professional training and spiritual giftedness to bless people." What liberating permission-giving!

Principle Two: *Permission-giving churches encourage autonomous, on-the-spot decision-making by collaborative individuals and self-organizing ministry teams.*

Let's note another illustration of how theory turns into practice. Looking around at the numerous widows in his congregation, a man detected signs of neglect. His invitation to 30 men to join him for breakfast and conversation produced more than theological studies and discussions about a congregation's responsibility to widows. Each man adopted two or three widows and began providing assistance on a weekly basis. When widows were discovered having inadequate resources to cover monthly expenses, the men emptied their pockets and established a checking account on which any member of the ministry team could draw money. The thousands of dollars dispensed yearly by these men caring for widows is done on-the-spot by this self-organized team. Incidentally, these men, all members of the same congregation, have never established a widows' program, have never been coordinated by a church staff member, and have never asked the elders if they could have permission to care for the widows. The permission-giving church expects autonomous decision-making by collaborative individuals and self-organized teams.

Principle Three: *Permission-giving churches encourage ministry to be delivered any time, any place, by anyone, no matter what.*

Recently a congregation developed a vision for a domestic church planting in their region. A ministry team was established to provide communication, procedures, and fund raising for the project. During the communication phase of the undertaking, a church member (not on the ministry team) got so excited about ministry possibilities that he invited numerous friends to write an unauthorized letter to church members encouraging them to support the ministry with prayers and money. A church staff member, convinced that the commission process was ignored, complained to the ministry team leader. The ministry leader reminded the staff member that a permission-giving church, while sometimes messy, allows God's Spirit to work instead of attempting to control every aspect of a ministry. Incidentally, the ministry group requested \$280,000 for the church planting and the permission-giving congregation committed more than \$310,000.

Principle Four: Permission-giving churches need boundaries and accountability.

Church leaders have a vital role in permission-giving congregations. They must constantly articulate biblical and theological principles which are foundational for the congregation. Precious biblical principles and standards should be understood by every member and ministry team. While permission-giving churches provide a climate of creativity, innovation, and possibilities, the acknowledged boundaries and accountability provide mutual trust and collaboration.

Leadership Network⁴, when introducing Easum's writings to their readers, used this story, with which I conclude. *In the early years of the 20th Century, the Chinese people were faced with adjusting to life in a world that was radically different from anything they had known for hundreds of years. It became common to greet one another with the question, "Are you living in the new world yet?"*

1 David Goetz and Kevin Miller, "Megashifts," Leadership, XVI:4 (Fall, 1995): 111-113.

2 William M. Easum, Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1995).

3 R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, The Equipping Pastor (An Alban Institute Publication, 1993).

4 Next, from Leadership Network, 1:3 (October, 1995):1.

Fostering Congregational Consensus

by Mike Armour

November, 1996 – March, 1997

The surest way to bring a church to a standstill is to insist that all decisions be unanimous. On the other hand, many a church has blown apart when leaders imposed decisions that lacked wholesale support.

Fortunately, we are not forced to choose between unanimity on one hand and arbitrary decision-making on the other. In between lies a broad middle ground called “consensus.”

As its spelling suggests, “consensus” is related to the word “consent.” Consensus means that people generally consent to a given course of action.

Does this mean they consider it the best course of action? Not necessarily. But they do see it as an acceptable one. They are therefore willing to support this course of action, or at least not oppose it.

Thus, in coming to consensus, we have to remind ourselves periodically that we are not looking for a *perfect* solution, but rather one that is *workable*. Far too often we put off a good choice for months, even years, while fruitlessly trying to find the *perfect* choice. A *good* choice made in a timely fashion tends to be far more fruitful than a *perfect* choice made too late.

True consensus-building, then, is not waiting for the absolutely best decision. Consensus-building is finding a plan with a reasonable promise of success, then rallying everyone behind it.

But that’s sometimes easier said than done. As I travel the country, I hear church leaders everywhere talk about the tension they feel as they try to build consensus in their congregation. And when I ask about the source of this tension, their answers all boil down to one word—diversity. Too many people with too many ideas about how things ought to be done.

Two years ago Don Browning and I addressed this problem in a book titled *Systems-Sensitive Leadership: Empowering Diversity without Polarizing the Church*. In that book we offered a detailed description of eight world views that coexist on our planet today. Not only that, these world views sit side by side in the pew.

Most tension in today’s church arises from the interplay of three specific world views, or “thinking systems,” as we call them in our book. Based on the order in which they appeared in human history, we refer to these three as Systems 4, 5, and 6.

Forty years ago System 4 reigned unchallenged in most congregations. System 5 and System 6, while rising in our society, had as yet left little impact on the church. But in the 1960s and ‘70s that began to change. In many congregations today System 5 and System 6 are not only prominent, they often dominate.

At the same time, a very large element of the congregation and its leadership may have retained a purely System 4 outlook. What's critical about this is that each system approaches the work of the church with a unique set of priorities. This unique approach stems from a specific life issue that governs each system.

For System 4 the issue is creating social and moral stability in a world given to hedonism, impulse, passion, and violence. For System 5 the critical life issue is breaking free of conformist pressure to find personal fulfillment and achievement. For System 6 the issue is building bonds of intimacy and mutual support in a world given to insensitivity, alienation, and exploitation.

Now, on the surface those differences seem innocent enough. They all sound like legitimate concerns. But when these core issues translate into specific ideas about "how to do church," harmony is often strained, especially when the question of change comes up.

That's because Systems 5 and 6 are highly interested in change, while System 4 is quite guarded about change. System 5, with its resentment of excessive pressure to conform, wants to be free to try new approaches, to experiment with new ways of doing things. It loves variety and thrives on it. If we change the format of our worship service week after week, that's just dandy with System 5 people. System 5 also presses for a leadership that delegates heavily and leaves broad rights of initiative in the hands of deacons and ministry workers.

System 6 also longs for change. What System 6 envisions is a new human community where the "have nots" and the "left outs" of an earlier day find non-judgmental acceptance. System 6 therefore wants to eliminate any barriers, real or symbolic, that would make people feel excluded.

This shows up, for instance, in dress codes. As System 6 grows in prominence, coats and ties disappear in worship. System 6 also has a bias against being overly organized. As System 6 sees it, organizations tend to become impersonal and heartless. System 6 thus minimizes formal structure wherever it can.

As we've already noted, however, System 4 has misgivings about change. Not that System 4 *refuses* to change. But it does so at a more measured, cautious pace.

This stems in part from a rather low regard for human nature. System 4 believes that human beings, left unchecked, resort instinctively to pleasure-seeking, near-term gratification, violence, and even ruthlessness. System 4 views its role as keeping those impulses in check.

For that reason System 4 lends itself to keeping things under control. It restricts options and maintains structure. It wants authoritarian leadership. It seeks order and predictability. And to this end, System 4 creates rules and policies on every turn. In its unhealthy forms, indeed, System 4 turns into legalism.

Now, given these differences, it might seem impossible to keep all these systems working harmoniously under the same roof. But, as Jesus said, with God all things are possible. And God is truly the starting place for helping us transcend system differences.

To begin with, these differences are God-made. According to the research that identified these systems, they all leave their own unique signature on personal neurology and psychology. In other words, God wired this diversity into us. And God never gave us a gift that was intended to polarize or debilitate the body of Christ.

So the challenge is to resist the temptation of throwing up our hands over system differences and going our separate ways. Rather, what's called for is rolling up our sleeves and learning new styles of leadership that harness the strength of each system. The question of the hour is this: Since God created these differences, how would he have us use them to his glory and the furtherance of his kingdom? That question will move us away from polarization and nudge us toward a common game plan.

Don and I devoted roughly half of our book to specific recommendations on how to transcend system differences in worship, Bible classes, volunteer management, evangelism, preaching styles, and other arenas of ministry. In the restricted space of this article I obviously cannot recapitulate all that material.

But as we've taught seminars on this subject for several years now, we have come to realize the importance of several factors when it comes to building consensus in a multi-system church.

First, we need to remind ourselves frequently to remember whose church it really is. In times of tension or conflict we often hear people say, "I don't want my church doing..." But it's not *my* church. It's the *Lord's* church. And so the ultimate question is not what *I* want, but what *he* wants. And apparently he wants us to rise above our differences and diversity. Otherwise he would not have placed us side by side in the Body.

Second, we need to focus frequently on overarching aims. When lines are drawn in congregational struggles, we start to question the motives of those who oppose us. We begin to zero in on how different they are from us, losing sight of many ways in which we are in fact alike.

We need regular reminders, therefore, that the same great purposes motivate all of us. Things like making worship rich and meaningful for everyone. Or finding the most effective way to reach lost souls. Or offering Bible classes that promote true spiritual growth. No one, regardless of his systems preference, is likely to disagree with such goals.

If you look at Paul's letters to conflicted churches, indeed, you will find that this was precisely the way he dealt with many issues. He appealed to his readers to recognize the overarching principles that they all subscribed to. Then, having reunited their hearts on the basis of the things they shared in common, Paul believed they could find a way to allow for and work around their diversity.

Third, we need to acknowledge our differences, but discuss them in terms of overarching aims. Let me illustrate by offering an example from a recent Sunday morning at our congregation.

As I introduced the service I said, “You will notice on your program of worship that there are several songs and readings during our communion. Many of you, we know, prefer a communion done quietly, with no songs or readings. That makes it more meaningful for you. But there are many others in our church for whom the communion is far richer when songs and readings reinforce its meaning. Now, all of us want the communion to be a peak experience regularly for every worshipper, don’t we? So we vary the style of communion from time to time, to meet the needs of everyone. Next week, in fact, we will conduct our communion without songs or readings to allow you the uninterrupted silence and reflection you prefer. But today we are meeting the needs of others.”

The effect of this appeal was not to ask people to accept a communion service conducted in a way that went against their preferences. The ultimate appeal was for them to respect the principle of regularly making the communion a peak experience for every worshipper. On that principle we are very likely to find consensus.

Fourth, be purposeful and relentless in promoting deep, trusting relationships. Consensus is more likely to prevail in a congregation of interwoven lives. If someone I truly care for disagrees with me, I have a strong motivation to find a way to continue our relationship, despite our differences.

But where relationships are superficial, even slight differences can jeopardize harmony. None of these recommendations, of course, is a cure-all for tension. But these are crucial foundation stones for building congregational consensus. Even Paul and Barnabas could not always see things eye-to-eye. And neither can we.

The challenge, then, is this. When we don’t see eye-to-eye, how will we respond to that difference in a way that advances the kingdom of God? Managing our differences through that perspective will keep us on the same track and help us find a way to work together.

Hope Network Newsletter: They Smell Like Sheep

by Lynn Anderson

November, 1996 – March, 1997

One Sunday a friend cornered me after I had preached a sermon on *Elders as Shepherds*. “Why don’t you find a better way to communicate this spiritual leadership idea?” he asked. “No one in our church knows anything about shepherds and sheep, especially the way all that stuff worked in the ancient world. People like me just can’t get it.” Admittedly, the shepherd metaphor does sound strange in today’s cyberworld. But God keeps sending me back to the pasture. The shepherd notion is not original with me, of course, nor with Paul and Peter. Not even with Jesus. Shepherd walks through the whole long story of God’s people, showing up more than 500 times in the Old and New Testaments. Without question, the shepherd motif is the dominant biblical model for spiritual leaders.

After mulling things over for some time, I explained to my modern friend who had trouble with ancient shepherds, “I can’t find a current metaphor to fit the biblical leadership model. And I don’t want to rip about 500 pages out of my Bible, or risk feeding the church wrong-headed ideas. So I’m sticking with ‘shepherd.’”

Pull up a chair as we dust off the various notions of shepherd we may have. What is a shepherd, anyway?

Shepherds in “Olden” Times

Shepherds in Bible times were as familiar in the Middle East as are automobiles and telephones in modern America. But in those days, sheep were not crowded into feedlots and tracked by computers. Shepherds did not get their jobs by answering “Help wanted on Bethlehem-area sheep ranch” ads at the employment office. Shepherding was no part-time fair-weather affair. Ancient shepherds actually lived a sheep’s lifetime in the pasture with the flock. When a tiny lamb was born into his wilderness world, among the first sensations felt by the shivering lamb was the tender touch of the shepherd. And the shepherd’s gentle voice helped awaken the lamb’s delicate eardrums. The shepherd protected the lambs, talked to them, caressed them, and led them to the fresh pools and luxuriant pastures, day and night. By the time the lambs reached “ewe-hood” or “ram-hood” they completely relied on that one shepherd and followed his voice and his alone. That is how flocks were formed.

It’s how *spiritual flocks* are formed today as well. People naturally gather around a loving, serving Christian who nourishes their faith, guides them, protects them, and affirms them with affectionate touch and loving word. What is a shepherd? Grab your pencil and circle the profound answer: A shepherd is someone who has a flock.

God As Shepherd

The Bible first applies the word shepherd to God himself. “The Lord is my shepherd...” (Psalm 23:1). “He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:11). Get the picture? An awkward new-born lamb, ears askew, one gangly leg dangling from near the shepherd’s elbow. A bearded head muzzling the lamb’s cheek and a resonant voice murmuring gently to the delicate creature as shepherd and lamb move through the twilight. Oh, yes, “We *are* the people of his pasture, and the flock under his care” (Psalm 95-7).

Prophets, Priests and Kings as Shepherds

Scripture also pictures God’s prophets and priests and kings as shepherds. God “chose David his servant...from the sheep pens, from tending sheep God called David to be the shepherd of his people...” (Psalm 78:70-72). God also warned false shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture. I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done.... You have not strengthened the weak or... bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally” (Ezekiel 34:1-4). Church leaders, listen up!

Jesus, The Good Shepherd

In New Testament times, Jesus himself said, “I am the good shepherd” who “lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, 14). Jesus did not describe himself as “the brave cowboy.” The cowboy rides a cutting horse, cracks a whip, and wields a shock prod. He forces the “herd” to go his way. Not so the shepherd. He depends on relationship. Jesus does not force us; he leads us. “When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4).

Some years back, my friend Roy stood on a ridge in Palestine, overlooking a long, narrow gorge. Below him, the gorge opened out into rolling, grass-covered pasture lands. A single trail meandered downward through the ravine to branch out into dozens of trails where the gorge met the valley floor. Several shepherds strolled down the gorge trail, chatting with each other, followed by a long, winding river of sheep. Roy stood amazed at what followed. At the forks of the trail, the shepherds shook hands and separated, each taking a different path into the grasslands. As the shepherds headed their separate ways, the mass of sheep automatically divided into smaller flocks, each stringing down the trail behind its own shepherd. When the shepherds were distanced from each other by considerable space, each turned to scan the terrain behind him for strays. Then one of the shepherds cupped his hands around his mouth and called in a strange, piercing cry, “Ky-yia-yia-yia-yia.” A couple of stray lambs perked up their ears and bounded toward his voice. Then a second shepherd tilted back his head and called with a distinctly different sound. A few more strays hurried straight toward him. Yet another called his strays with a third distinctive sound. Each stray, hearing a familiar voice, knew exactly which shepherd to follow. My friend marveled, “None of the wandering sheep seemed to notice any sound but the voice of his own shepherd.” This is what Jesus meant when he said, “My sheep hear my voice” but refuse to “follow the voice of a stranger.”

Jesus shepherded his twelve. They went where he went: weddings, fishing, temples, villages, fields, city streets, synagogues, sickrooms, everywhere. Day in and day out, they heard his voice way down in their souls. How different from some who aspire to be elders, but who have no flock. They have none who come for shepherding, none who listen to their voice, none who cluster around them.

The Gate

Jesus continued, “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). Make up your mind, Jesus. What are you? A shepherd? A gate? This looks like a mixed metaphor to us, but first-century hearers saw a clear image of shepherds who had literally become gates. Roughly constructed temporary sheepfolds dotted the pastoral landscape, makeshift circles of brush and rocks piled into barricades four or five feet high to form safe little “fortresses” in the wilderness. Sheepfolds. But each circle was broken at one place, leaving a gateway into the fold. At the end of the day, the shepherd would take his place beside this portal to gather his flock into the fold. Each sheep passing under his rod for inspection would feel the shepherd’s hands and hear his voice speak its name. “Good evening my friend, Yellow-wool. You look tired. Long day. Come in. And you, Ragged-ear... and Spotted-face...” until all the sheep were safely in the fold. Finally, as he bedded down for the night, the shepherd stretched his own body across the opening. *The shepherd physically became the door!* His body kept the sheep in and the dangers out. Morning, it is said, occasionally found sheep carcasses scattered around the fold, and the bleeding, battle-worn body of a shepherd lying near the gap. Jesus is both “the gate” and “the good shepherd” who “lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Good spiritual shepherds today imitate the *Chief Shepherd*. Like him they attract flocks through loving service and authentic relationships. They feed and protect their flocks. They know their flocks and are known and trusted by their flocks. They put their very lives on the line for the precious people they lead.

Hirelings Need Not Apply

The good shepherd Jesus described is not at all like a hired hand. The hired hand “administers an organization.” He withholds or grants permission “in the best interests of the institution” with little feel for real, live persons. When his back is to the wall he may resort to “the organizationally expedient” thing, may even throw lambs to the wolves in order to save his own reputational skin. This kind of leader need not expect the affection and loyalty of “a following.” Jesus was no hireling. Nor are true shepherds today.

Apostles as Shepherds

Jesus also charged the apostles to shepherd his flock. “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15). “Take care of my sheep” (v. 16), and “Feed my sheep” (v. 17).. The apostles were to continue in the leadership style of their teacher. That was Jesus’ statement to the Father: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Like Jesus their teacher, the apostles shepherded “flocks” of ministry apprentices. One even spelled out the procedure: “What you

have learned from me, pass on to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Good shepherds still do this today.

Elders as Shepherds

Finally, Scripture describes elders of the church as “*shepherds of God’s flock.*” Paul urged elders, “Keep watch over...the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be *shepherds* of the church ... savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:28). Peter wrote, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Modern church leaders, please *don’t miss the point.* Surely the apostles’ choice of the word shepherd is quite intentional. They called elders shepherds because, across the centuries of Scripture, a massive iceberg of divine meaning had accumulated beneath the surface of the word shepherd. The apostles’ elder friends knew this well. So, with the word shepherd, Paul and Peter did not merely throw in a colorful figure of speech, but invoked a *whole theological paradigm of spiritual leadership.* While other metaphors for spiritual leaders, such as *dpiskopoi* and *presbuteroi*, appear in Scripture, the dominant one is *poimainoi* or shepherds. Good elders are gentle, hands-on shepherds who smell like sheep!

Fast-Lane Flocks and Cyberworld Shepherds

Harold’s lip quivered slightly and he wrung his napkin. “Shepherd is a beautiful idea,” he began, “looks like it’s what God wants of me as an elder in this church. But how do I make this happen in the real world? Why, the first three days of last week I was in New York, the last two in Houston. I roll out at 5 a.m. and run all day. Most of our congregation does the same. Not much sheep-smell rubs off from a quick Sunday handshake in the foyer.”

Harold and his flock live in the express lane of a cyberworld—yet he longs to be a biblical shepherd. Can it happen?

Modern day shepherds in need of time shortcuts may be tempted to transfer popular models from secular management. But Jesus said, “Do not be like them.” Quaint as it may seem, elders are still spiritual shepherds, not *one minute managers.* Jesus is still—and always will be—the model for ministry and leadership. We must *follow* only him. As Jesus modeled it, a good deal of authentic shepherding is hands-on and personal. While few shepherd-hearted elders would militantly defend the “distant CEO” view of eldering, some personalities regard the relational dimensions of shepherding as “touchy-feely” kind of stuff that, like quiche, is not palatable to “real men.” But flocks feel a sense of loss when elders neglect informal bonding with their people. Put plainly, church systems that impede this function are not from God! Elders who shepherd well, however, foster congregational infrastructures that leave them plenty of time and opportunity for flock-building.

Smelling like sheep is a tall order for modern, fast-lane shepherds, but some are pulling it off. Hugh, for example, backed into shepherding Steve without even realizing it. Steve came to Christ through M. J. Then M. J. moved away. But Steve was still God-hungry. He wanted the skills to feed himself spiritually and to lead his wife, Mary, to Jesus. We encouraged Steve to

meet with Hugh, and, although Hugh is a very busy executive, he met weekly with Steve for several months and shepherded him to such levels that Steve now shepherds his own lunch-hour flock. Hugh never called it shepherding. But it was.

Harold, whom we met earlier, has discovered that his fax and email have become “rod and staff” in the hands of this thoughtful shepherd. His flock swaps prayer requests, accountability, and biblical insights on their daily email roundtable.

Other skilled shepherds orchestrate magic shepherdic moments where they can meaningfully touch several sheep at once. I watched our shepherds “tending the flock” in this way on a Monday evening at their “shepherds’ circle” (read elders’ meeting). First up, these elders drew the Carter family into their shepherds’ circle to pray for little Cameron, the Carter’s precious four-month-old daughter who was facing major surgery to correct a congenital heart problem. Our shepherds gathered around the Carters, laid their hands on them, and spoke loving concern for the family—especially baby Cameron. One shepherd voiced a stirring prayer for peace upon dad, mom, and big brother. Another shepherd took little Cameron’s face in his hands and his voice trembled as he spoke a blessing on her and prayed God’s healing touch. Then hugs, tears, powerful shepherding!

Praise God, Cameron’s surgery was successful and she is a healthy, growing girl. Plus, long after Cameron’s full recovery, the Carter family will feel those hands and hear those voices—maybe for a lifetime! All that from a few “magic shepherding moments.”

That same evening, Dr. Jan Dunn’s *Challenge* group brought a report. Each person reporting lives under the time crunch of the fast-paced marketplace. *Challenge* is a special support group sponsored by our church. It began as a divorce recovery group, then broadened to include any persons struggling with painful relationships. I watched the eyes of our elders glow as Jan and friends described the ways God touches hurting people through *Challenge*. Divorced people finding recovery (three sat right there in the circle). Troubled marriages finding healing. Then our shepherds poured out affirmation for Jan and her team. They roundly endorsed the *Challenge* ministry and the people it brings our way—many of whom wear scars received at the hands of churches! One shepherd said, “You folks are simply being Jesus Christ. Jesus spent most of his time loving the crushed and broken. We thank God for you.” More prayers ascended, and our shepherds walked from that room smelling like sheep. Their flock left feeling deeply cared for, and with new tomorrows written across their faces.

Thank God that shepherding can and does happen in our fast-lane cyberworld! God designed a model, revealed it in Scripture, embodied it in Jesus, and passed it on to spiritual leaders of all time. He called it shepherding. And when elders do it, they imitate the ways of Jesus and reflect the very heart of God.

Several years ago, Carolyn and I rode a tour bus through Israel’s countryside, spellbound by Ahim, our unusually gifted tour guide. Ahim, who likes to laugh at himself, told how one of his tours fizzled. Ahim said he was reeling off his spiel about shepherds, who don’t drive the sheep, they lead them, etc. etc., when he suddenly realized he had totally lost his audience. They were all pointing out the bus window at a man chasing a “herd” of sheep, siccing the dog on them,

throwing rocks at them, and whacking them with sticks. “The sheep-driving man in the field,” lamented Ahim, “torpedoed my whole fascinating story, metaphor and all.” Ahim said at that point he jumped off the bus, accosted the man, and scolded him. “Do you understand what you have just done to me? I was spinning this charming story about the gentle ways of shepherds and here you are hazing and assaulting these sheep! What is going on?”

A bewildered look froze on the face of the poor fellow driving the sheep, then the light dawned and he blurted out, “Man, you’ve got me all wrong. I’m not a shepherd. I’m a *butcher!*” Nuff said!

We need shepherds. Please, no more hirelings...no more board members... no more cowboys... and, especially, no more butchers. Give us shepherds... ‘til the Chief Shepherd comes...

AfterGlow: Leading by Serving

by Phillip Morrison

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“What does it take to make a good baseball manager?” the sports writer asked. Yogi Berra cut through all the fog (except his own) and gave a succinct answer: “A good ball club.” That is fine for leaders who have a bench full of skilled players, or a church full of committed Christians. But Jesus came to a world full of reluctant, even rebellious people, and provided the most effective leadership the world has ever seen. And he did it without military might, monetary wealth, or political power.

Jesus—God in human form—knew the mind of God more perfectly than anyone else who has ever lived. And he knew humanity better than anyone (See Hebrews 1:1,2; 4:15). P. T. Forsyth put it this way: “You must live with people to know their problems, and live with God in order to solve them.” Many can do one or the other; few can do both; none can do both as well as Jesus did.

As we look to him for our leadership model, we find it difficult to understand his insistence on servant leadership. Where is the prestige, the power, the glory in servanthood? Not in this life, but in the life to come! Even He was despised and rejected by mankind, not victorious until God raised him up and glorified him.

Beginning at an early age, most of us are encouraged to be successful, to be leaders. But we spend too much of life doing all the things that doom us to fail as spiritual leaders. Screaming out our frustrations at a motivational seminar, imitating the management techniques of a best-selling author (who probably makes most of his money selling books), or learning how to intimidate and manipulate people have little to do with spiritual leadership.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7), Jesus taught that spiritual leaders are humble to the point of being abused, are aware of their identity as salt and light, exhibit superior standards of personal behavior, are sensitive to the needs of others, are people of prayer and fasting, understand their heavenly destiny, and always live in anticipation of the final judgment. Like our Master, we are not here to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

A preacher friend who had committed a grievous sin told how he sought the forgiveness of his congregation. As he sat on the front pew, head bowed in humiliation, he became aware of movement on both sides and felt arms around his shoulders. He raised his head to see two of his elders, sharing his pain, and mingling their tears with his own. Every preacher I know would turn backflips in the town square at high noon for elders like that.

Theirs was leadership in the Jesus style.