

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The **Word and Work**



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

MAY, 2004

**Churches should
Meet GOD, and Meet NEEDS!**

* * *

A Balanced Diet

* * *

"Body Life"

* * *

During the great spiritual awakening in eighteenth-century England, evangelist George Whitfield wrote to his converts:

"My brethren, let us plainly and freely tell one another what God has done for our souls. To this end you would do well, as others have done, to form yourselves into little companies . . . and **meet once a week to tell each other what is in your hearts; that you may then also pray for and comfort each other as need shall require. None but those who have experienced it can tell the unspeakable advantages of such a union and communion of souls.** None I think that truly loves his own soul, and his brethren as himself, will be shy of opening his heart, in order to have their advice, reproof, admonition, and prayers, as occasions require. A sincere person will esteem it one of the greatest blessings.

The 57th Annual Kentucky / Indiana Fellowship

August 2nd - 5th, 2004

Theme: GOD'S WORD Deals With TODAY'S PROBLEMS

Monday Evening, August 2

7:30 The Impact of One Life Sonny Childs

Tuesday, August 3 - Encouragement From God's Word

9:00 Prayer Time
9:20 Ambition: Vice or Virtue Billy Ray Lewter
10:20 Stress in Church Leadership Alex Wilson
11:20 Romans 9: God's Faithfulness & Israel's Unbelief
Don McGee
1:15 The Ground of Hope Jim Gillaspie
7:30 Caught Between Two Worlds Billy Ray Lewter

Wednesday, August 4 - Equipped By God's Word

9:00 Prayer Time
9:20 Walking in the Spirit Dale Offutt
10:20 Bearing the Cross Amid Stumbling Blocks Dennis Royse
11:20 Romans 10: Wrong Righteousness and God's Remedy
Don McGee
1:15 Dressed for Battle John McNerney
7:30 Presenting Ourselves to God Buford Smith

Thursday, August 5 - Edified By God's Word

9:00 Prayer Time
9:20 The Church in Crisis Darren Johnson
10:20 God in Relationship with the Church Cecil Garrett
11:20 Romans 11: God is Not Through with Israel Don McGee
1:15 A Better Church Begins with Me Jason Duncan
7:30 Preaching Christ to a Changing World Julius Hovan

Daily Lunch: 12:00

Nightly Youth Activities after the regular meeting.

There will be a Missionary Offering Wednesday Night.

Dinners at Sellersburg: Tues. (SBS), Thur. (Goin' Fishing) plus
Goin' Fishing Breakfast & Missions Conference Friday 8:30 - Noon.

For Housing: Bud Ridgeway (502) 477-8255;

Clint Dorman (812) 246-2600

**DAY SESSIONS: Portland Church of Christ,
2500 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212**

**NIGHT SESSIONS: Sellersburg Church of Christ
211 South New Albany St., Sellersburg IN 47172**

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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In This Issue

Theme: Churches Should Meet GOD and Meet NEEDS.

Encounter With Power -- Daniel Mitchum	130
Recipes for a Balanced Diet -- Alex V. Wilson	132
Strong Church Rescues Hurting Couple	135
Honest Sharing of Burdens and Failures, Because of God's New Covenant -- Ray Stedman	136
Authentic Fellowship -- Howard A. Snyder	137
Teamwork, Participation and Variety -- Tom Langford	138
The Holy Spirit and Church Meetings -- Alexander Maclaren .	139
"Body Life" -- Ray Stedman	140
An Important Ingredient in Continuous Revival -- Norman Grubb	143
Do We Stifle the Holy Spirit? -- James Denny	146
Church Attendance - How Many Times a Week? - Edward Fudge	148
The Maternal Side of God -- Darren Johnson	149
Jesus Touched Lepers -- Leroy Garrett	154
Parable: An Unfruitful Tree and its Caring Keeper -- Jim Girdley	156
Voices From The Fields	158
News and Notes -- Bennie Hill	160

I had nearly bumped into the President of the United States, and the very thought terrified me.

Encounter With Power

As Told to Daniel Mitchum

I stood in the lobby of the fanciest hotel I'd ever seen, ready to go to Ronald Reagan's Victory Party. It was July 1984. The thought of me, a college student, sitting in the same room with dignitaries and celebrities to hear the President of the United States accept his re-nomination gave me butterflies.

But without my friend Mark, who had invited me to the celebration, I could go nowhere. He had two special passes to the California Room on the twentieth floor, where the President would give his victory speech.

For a few minutes I watched people pour into the lobby of the hotel, presenting their invitations and boarding elevators. But soon I began to worry that Mark might not see me in the crowd. Hoping to spot him, I casually strolled up and down the hotel hallways.

As I wandered, the hotel seemed to grow bigger and bigger, and I must have made a few wrong turns. Efforts to retrace my steps failed; I realized I was lost. But I kept walking.

A moment later I noticed five well-dressed men walking as if they knew where they were going. Rather than admit to someone that I was lost, I decided to follow them. They didn't even seem to notice me.

We passed through a door and suddenly entered a large maintenance area. In front of us stood a service elevator flanked on each side by two armed guards. *Oh no*, I thought. *I shouldn't be here.* Who are these guys? Then I noticed that my companions had small radiolike devices in their ears. They boarded the open elevator and waited for me to come in. I wanted to run away, but there was nowhere to go.

Still acting cool and confident, I got on the elevator and watched one of the men push the button marked "California Room." In that awful moment I put it all together: Not only was I going to see the President, I was going in with the Secret Service.

I tried to look calm and professional as the elevator inched upward. One of the men told a joke, and I forced a laugh. I prayed that they wouldn't be nice and try to get to know me. Finally the door opened.

We stepped through a long hallway and a door into a large room filled with sophisticated audio-visual equipment. Dozens of men scrambled around collecting information and giving instructions. No one even looked at me.

I began to panic. *What will happen if they discover me?* I wondered *What will I be accused of?* Thoughts of prison danced in my head. They would never believe that I had followed these men in here by mistake.

Desperate to find an exit, I noticed a couple of men leaving through a door in the back of the room and filed in behind them. As we went through the door I couldn't believe my eyes--we were now standing on the main platform, several feet away from the President's podium.

My heart pounded as I scanned the stage. On my left I saw some stairs that led down into the audience. Disappearing into the crowd was my only hope.

I turned around slowly and sauntered down the stairs, imagining the arm of a Secret Service agent coming up from behind and carting me off. Sure enough, I sensed a stir in the crowd as I descended. I froze.

But they weren't looking at me at all. As I reached the bottom of the stairs the President himself entered the stage from the same door I had used seconds before. I had made it out just in time.

As I lay awake that night, the evening's events played over and over in my mind. I had nearly bumped into one of the most powerful men on earth, and the very thought terrified me.

Strangely, the whole fiasco made me think about how I relate to God, the Lord of the Universe.

Every day this God actually *invites* me into his presence. Yet how often do I take him up on the invitation? And how often do I feel the same awe and terror in His presence that I felt in President Reagan's?

Standing on that presidential platform reminded me of who I was--powerless, afraid and acutely aware that I had no right to be there. Shouldn't I also feel that way as I enter the presence of God? After all, we humans have no inherent right to approach God directly. Only because God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself--by sending Jesus--can we draw near at all.

When I feel complacent about spending time with God, I remember my brush with the President. And awe seeps into my prayers all over again.

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Theme: Churches should Meet GOD and Meet NEEDS.

Recipes for a Balanced Diet

Alex V. Wilson

"How do you do?" -- your congregation, that is. How balanced is the spiritual diet you have there? Do you and your fellow-Christians provide each other with a wholesome amount of four essentials -- **instruction, worship, fellowship, and service**? Or are you in a rut, overly bound by traditional practices?

In our February issue we thought at length about church meetings, "mutual edification," and home gatherings. Also related topics such as pulpit-centered, table-centered and pew-centered churches. We also invited feedback: "Tell us of any helpful way(s) in which your church (or others you know of) carry out the Bible principles and practices we are studying." Only one reader responded so far; be sure to read Tom Langford's helpful observations this month. If anyone else has something to share with us, please do so.

Folks learn much more when they are participants rather than passive. If most of our members are mere spectators, there won't be much growth. Another hindrance is routine, resulting in boredom. When Sunday morning, Sunday night and the midweek service are carbon copies of each other, ho-hum is sure to occur. Here are a few examples to stimulate the thinking of us all.

(1) In evangelism often the message and the audience don't fit each other. Sometimes the sermon is meaty teaching for grown-up Christians, and unsaved visitors--to whom that message is meaning-

less--drop in. At other times the message is evangelistic, but not one lost person attends. For this reason a church in England has regular "**Guest Services**": certain pre-announced times each month are evangelistic in purpose. The preacher naturally adapts his message to the occasion, and all the members make special efforts to bring their unsaved acquaintances at those times. Special prayer is made, also plans for follow-up.

(2) **Testimony Meetings** sometimes reach the unsaved better than sermons do. And they are refreshing to Christians too -- or else they show up our spiritual barrenness, if that is our condition. (Is that why we rarely have them?) The Psalmist said, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord . . . Oh magnify the Lord with me." They work better in smaller gatherings held in classrooms or somewhere that folks can sit in a circle.

(3) Several times I've heard or given "messages" which were almost 100% scripture. After a few introductory comments, the speaker **Reads Right Through an Entire Book of the Bible**, such as Philippians, 2 Timothy, James or Esther. Another option is to read a whole section of a book, for example, the entire Sermon on the Mount. In this "telescopic method" of Bible study you often notice things which you miss if you use only the "microscopic" method (studying just a topic, or paragraph or verse at a time). The themes and emphases of the book stand out, and the relationships between various parts of an epistle, for instance, become clearer. Telescopic study is the best way of preparing for microscopic study of a book, just as observing a forest from the air helps you when you want to go through the forest on foot.

(4) A friend of mine once attended a Quaker meeting. There was a Bible lesson given by a teacher, followed by a period of at least 30 minutes of **Silent Meditation**, nobody saying a word! While we might consider that to be extreme, we would nonetheless receive rich dividends from occasional unrushed periods of silent prayer, contemplation, and communion with the Most High. Such a period of even 5-10 minutes might profit us greatly, once people got used to it. (My friend said she got more from that period than from the sermon that day!)

(5) Being a member of a large congregation often makes one feel lost in the "lonely crowd." This is especially true now because many people commute long distances to church, and never see their fellow-members except at church meetings. This is a big hindrance to intimate fellowship. Christians who have been members of a congregation for years may hardly know anyone else there. Thus

they may be in a spiritual vacuum, not feeling really close to any other Christian.

One church combats this tendency by spending part of their weekly prayer-meeting in **Praying Two-By-Two**. At that time the members scatter throughout the auditorium in twos. Then quietly each one shares his thanksgiving, needs, and burdens with her (or his) regular prayer-partner, to whom she probably feels free to confide matters too personal to be mentioned in a large group. Another advantage: think how many more specific requests can be prayed for in this way than is possible in the usual type prayer meeting.

Other churches at times **Divide Into Age Groups or Interest Groups for Prayer** – groups that mainly pray for foreign mission work, or the local young people, or disciples undergoing intense persecution. Yet this idea of dividing up into smaller meetings for prayer (or other activities), with all its advantages, can be overdone. Sometimes it leads to having more loyalty to your own group than to the whole congregation. For example, some young people come to their Sunday school class or to young people's meetings, but never to general meetings of the church. This should be guarded against if possible.

We have seen at least five ways of bringing variety to our meetings, or providing different types of meetings, so that we might have an adequate supply of instruction, worship, fellowship, and service. Other articles this month present additional ideas. If these suggestions can be helpful to us, let's use them.

BUT we must never forget that methods, techniques, and types of meetings in themselves will not accomplish anything unless the Holy Spirit is working in our midst. Skillful organizing, well-planned services, a perfectly balanced diet -- these things *by themselves* will profit us nothing. Power is needed to make them effective, and "*power belongs to God.*" (Psa. 62:11.) To experience His power requires ongoing repentance and faith-based prayer. That happens only when folks hunger and thirst for God and His glory. He said, "You will seek me and find me when you *seek me with all your heart*" (Jer. 29:13). That ancient promise has not expired. Let's heed it. Then as He keeps His promise to the thirsty, and living water begins to flow (John 7:37-39), let's adapt our church gatherings and practices to be channels of His continuing blessing.

Strong Church Rescues Hurting Couple

Philip Yancey's excellent book, *After the Wedding*, gives a clear example of some of the principles spelled out in the editorial. *The importance and inter-relatedness of worship, fellowship and service* are shown in the experience of John and Claudia Claxton. This Christian couple had been happily married for exactly one-and-a-half years when disaster struck. Claudia was found to have Hodgkins's disease--cancer of the lymph glands. For the next two years fears, grief, "doubts and uncertainty traveled with us like a thundercloud." But Christ upheld them through His body. John tells about it:

"Psychologically, we received the biggest boost when we found a supportive church. The church was unlike any other we'd been to. The service is not spectacular; it contains the usual prayers and sermon and Scripture readings. But the focus of the service is on WORSHIPPING God. So often churches work at entertaining, or capturing interest, or using congregational-oriented gimmicks. This church is constructed to turn attention to God. Through the worship service we began to get our eyes off ourselves and our problems and learned to meet with God.

"And the people were fantastic. When we joined, the elders lovingly asked us about all we'd been through and explored with us ways in which they could help us. All of us were crying. We were swept up in their Christian LOVE and SUPPORT. A weight was lifted from us when we realized other Christians were willing to share our hurts, that our well-being was important to them. They prayed for us regularly and encouraged us to share our trials with them.

"As we became involved in the church, we found ourselves putting more of our energies into SERVING. We moved to a rundown area of Philadelphia, and began working with tutoring programs. I accepted a group within the congregation as mine to minister to."

Honest Sharing of Burdens and Failures, Because of God's New Covenant

Ray Stedman

Not long ago I was with a group of pastors and their wives in a conference. These were wonderful people, but they were inhibited, not free. I taught on the New Covenant all week long.

At the end of the meetings we had a service in which I invited them to share their difficulties and to help bear one another's burdens as part of the family of God. They were reluctant to do so, even as pastors, and their sharing was very superficial. They talked about some ordinary victories and joys, and a few very minor problems – like the need for a new mimeograph machine.

Finally I stopped them and said, "Look, you're going to go back as pastors wanting to teach your congregations how to share, and you're not sharing yourselves. You're not opening up your hurts and your hearts." And I urged them to do so.

A young man stood up and told about how he and his wife had returned from Brazil where they had been missionaries for three years. They had returned with a deep sense of failure, and had been resentful of others who had not understood what had gone on in their lives. Then a young woman stood up and told how her young husband, a pastor, had died the year before, and how lonely her life had been, how empty it was. She said, "I know you can't meet my needs like my husband did, but I just ask you to pray for me."

People began to weep and to pray for one another.

A man stood up and said that he and his wife had been going through a terrible time of distress because their daughter had died. No one had known that they were going through this, and this was the first time they were able to share their feelings. Then a man stood up and confessed his sin of judgmental criticism against a woman who was present, and asked her forgiveness. They forgave one another. Another woman stood up and shared how jealous she had been of her husband's ministry, and how wrong she knew this was. She realized that this was a sin in her own life, and asked for forgiveness. Soon they were sharing with one another out of their depths. Tears were running down their faces, and they were really praying and upholding one another.

I finally just sat down. The Lord was running the meeting, and He did not need me. We ended with a communion service in which many were feeling healed, restored, cleansed! As they passed the cup to one another, they would say, "Your sins are forgiven you." It was the New Covenant in action.

Authentic Fellowship

Howard A. Snyder

Excerpts from *Christianity Today*, Oct. 2003

Many churches have a superficial idea (and experience) of community. Christian community is easily mistaken for mere cordiality, courtesy, or sociability. It easily becomes least-common-denominator "fellowship," not much different from the Kiwanis or a neighborhood potluck. Often so-called Christian community is marked by nothing that is specifically Christian and nothing that challenges the values of surrounding pagan society.

[In contrast, note] the "*one another*" passages in the New Testament, such as "be devoted to one another" (Rom. 12:10), "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13), "carry one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). Most of these passages imply *behaviors*, not just *attitudes*. The writers are less concerned with how believers *feel* about each other than they are about their actions -- their living together as community and publicly as disciples.

Hebrews 10:24-25 shows that mutual encouragement ("...spur one another on toward love and good deeds...") was a primary church function. The author tells these brothers and sisters to be intentional: *Consider how* you may prompt one another to the practical living out of your faith. This passage also hints, however, that "some" were developing a bad "habit" of neglecting the meetings. So it is in any age or culture. Some people will drop by the wayside. The temptation then is to water down the intimacy or frequency or cost of meeting together, to accommodate those who want something less demanding.

This is a fatal mistake. Studies have shown repeatedly that churches with high belonging expectations are more vital, grow faster, have more counter-cultural impact, and last longer than those that relax the intensity of their community life.

Feedback on our Feb. issue—

Teamwork, Participation and Variety

Tom Langford, An elder
at the Quaker Ave. Church of Christ, Lubbock, Texas

I have just read with pleasure your February issue and I think you are to be commended for the focus. There is no question that professionalism has robbed the church of much of its life and scriptural growth. I don't know, however, how much change we can make. The protestant world, including Churches of Christ, is so devoted to the hired minister system, people don't seem to even listen when you talk about mutual edification.

You have asked for readers to respond with some description of their own practice. I will tell you of what we have been doing for the past 3 or 4 years. We have a Teaching Team, including four elders and one other supported minister. This team meets three times a year and plans the teaching for the next semester or summer, including topics, speakers, emphasis, perceived congregational needs, etc. The team then proposes the plan to all of the elders, who may approve or modify it according to their wisdom. All of us on the Team participate in the Sunday morning teaching, though our two supported ministers (one of whom is an elder) do proportionately more teaching than the rest of us, partly because of their capabilities and also because they are expected to devote more of their time to study.

On Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings we have a variety of other men who teach, so that during the course of the year, perhaps 25 or 30 men will have been in the pulpit. We frequently use our younger men on Wednesday nights. We employ a program called "Faith Chronicles," devised by David, my son, in which a youngster tells a Bible story, and an older teenager gives a short lesson based on that story. We don't have a Sunday School, as you know, so our families are expected to be faithful in teaching their children at home, using some of the materials we furnish them that is coordinated with "Faith Chronicles." It seems to work pretty well, though, of course, there are many ways we could improve.

On Sunday evenings, we have 8 or 9 home study groups in addition to a group that meets at the building in a more traditional service. We usually follow this format during the school year and come back together for regular Sunday evening services during the summer. These home groups have given a number of young men special opportunity to develop leadership abilities. We have just ordained

three new elders who were active in Life Group (as we call them) studies.

We are still beset with the typical formality in Sunday morning services, even though we have a variety of speakers. Most people seem to feel most comfortable with this traditional format, which probably would be easier to deviate from in a smaller congregation (we typically have about 300 in attendance). There is a strong argument to be made for smaller churches distributed throughout a community, but I fear that we in Churches of Christ have become pretty wed to the popular growth model and the "star" preacher.

Well, these are my reflections, for whatever they are worth.

The Holy Spirit and Church Meetings

Alexander Maclaren

[The following words become much more meaningful when we realize that Alexander Maclaren was an outstanding preacher in England during the 1800s. Some people thought he was as great a proclaimer of the Good News and teacher of the riches of God's Word as his contemporary, Charles Spurgeon. With that in mind, give attention to his observations. -avw]

I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the church to an official class ["preachers, pastors, ministers" or whatever] has done harm. Why should one man be for ever speaking, and hundreds of people who are able to teach, sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? I hate forcible revolution, and do not believe that any institutions, either political or ecclesiastical, which need violence to sweep them away, are ready to be removed. But I believe that if the level of spiritual life were raised among us, new forms would naturally be evolved, in which there should be a more adequate recognition of the great principle on which Christianity is founded: namely, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh—and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in these days of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy." [Joel 2:28.]

“*Body Life*”

Ray Stedman

[The late Ray Stedman wrote his influential book *Body Life* out of his study of Scripture and his experience in implementing its teachings at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California. Here are just a few excerpts from this significant volume. We recommend the whole book, written in 1972 but still in print.]

Unhealthy Saints

Great damage has been done to the cause of Christ by unhealthy saints who attempted to carry out evangelistic or social ministry with great zeal but without true spiritual health. Burdened with unsolved problems in their own lives, often displaying unhealthy (and unrecognized) hypocrisy and prejudice, these Christians bring the body of Christ and the gospel of Christ into disrepute in the world. Their worship has become a dull, lifeless, predictable ritual. They display more reverence for their own religious traditions than for biblical truths. They talk about superficial matters around the coffee pot after church, and they call it “fellowship” and “Christian love” – even though there is little if any real involvement in each others’ lives.

What is terribly missing in all too many churches is the experience of “body life” – that warm fellowship of Christian with Christian which the New Testament calls *koinonia*, and which was an essential part of early Christianity. The New Testament lays heavy emphasis upon the need for Christians to know each other, closely and intimately enough to be able to bear one another’s burdens, confess faults one to another, encourage, exhort, and admonish one another; and minister to one another with the Word, song, and prayer. As we carry out the various “one another” ministries of the New Testament-style body life, we will come to comprehend “with all saints,” as the apostle Paul says, “what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18-19).

There are over fifty “one another” statements and commands in the New Testament, and these call us to a special kind of life together – what we call “body life.”

Obviously, the “one another” ministries in the body of Christ are extremely important to God, since He speaks of them so frequently in His Word. So the question we ask ourselves is: “Where, in the usual traditional structure of the church is this kind of inter-

change possible? What provision is made by church leaders to encourage it and guide its expression through scriptural teaching and wise admonitions?"

In many churches, you can find some expression of body life taking place in private gatherings of Christians, usually in someone's home. But then, all too often, the church leaders find out about it, brand the gatherings as "divisive," and discourage body life from taking place! Authentic body life doesn't threaten the unity of the church – it is the very thing that the church is supposed to be about, according to the New Testament!

In the early church, as we see it described in the New Testament, we see a rhythm of body life evident in the way Christians gathered together in homes to instruct one another, study and pray together, and share the ministry of spiritual gifts. Then they would go out into the world to let the warmth and glow of their love-filled lives overflow into a spontaneous Christian witness that drew loved-starved pagans into the church like hungry children into a candy store.

This was exactly in line with the exhortation of Jesus to His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35)

The early church relied upon a twofold witness as the means of reaching and impressing a cynical and unbelieving world: *kerygma* (**proclamation**) and *koinonia* (**fellowship**). It was the combination of these two that made the church's witness so powerful and effective. Pagans could easily shrug off the proclamation as simply another "teaching" among many; but they found it much more difficult to reject the evidence of fellowship. The concern of Christians for each other, and the way they shared their lives in the same great family of God, left the pagan world craving and envying this new experience called fellowship. It prompted the much-quoted remark of a pagan writer: "How these Christians love one another!"

The present-day church has managed to do away with true New Testament fellowship almost completely, reducing the witness of the church to proclamation alone. It has thus succeeded in doing two things simultaneously: removing the major safeguard to the health of the church from within, and greatly weakening its effective witness before the world without. It is little wonder, therefore, that the church has fallen on evil days and is regarded as irrelevant and useless by so many in the world.

The law of love is fulfilled only by bearing one another's burdens. But how can we bear each other's burdens if we don't know what those burdens are? Some way of sharing these burdens with others is obviously called for.

Koinonia calls for honesty and openness with other Christians, and a mutual recognition that it is neither abnormal nor unspiritual to have burdens and problems in our day-to-day Christian experience. Somehow the masks have to come off. The facades that say "everything is all right" when everything is anything but right have to fall. Often this can best be done in small groups, meeting in homes....

Bearing one another's burdens at the very least means to uphold one another in prayer. It also means to be willing to spend time with another person so that you can thoroughly understand that person's feelings and problems. It means committing yourself to an authentic effort to relieve that person's pressures or discouragement, offering intense prayer, practical help, or wise counsel, not just a superficial word of "I'll pray for you."

Restoration of Biblical Fellowship

It's significant that whatever spiritual awakenings have occurred throughout Christian history, they have always been accompanied by a restoration of fellowship, including the confession of faults, and the bearing of one another's burdens.

When this kind of sharing and burden bearing takes place in a church, the elders and pastors will be relieved of much of the counseling and crisis intervention burden they might otherwise be forced to do. Many spiritual, emotional, and even mental problems could be solved at the beginning if caring Christians would accept their biblical responsibility to show genuine Christian love and concern for their brothers and sisters in the body. In fact, modern techniques of group therapy are built on this basic body life principle that had its beginnings in the early church.

Obviously there are certain matters that should not be voiced in an open meeting – matters of an intimate or scandalous nature, for example. Some types of sharing should be done privately between two or three individuals who are trustworthy and mature in their insights. But no Christian should bear a heavy burden alone. Those with the gift of encouragement should make themselves available to others for this ministry, and any who appear withdrawn, troubled, or downcast should be gently encouraged to unload their burden. The gift of a listening ear and an understanding heart is sometimes the greatest gift one Christian can give another.

The essential admonition in Scripture regarding the ministry of building up and edifying one another in the body of Christ is Ephesians 4:15; “speaking the truth in love.” In the Greek, the verb *speaking* does not appear. More literally, this verse says simply “truthing in love.” It conveys a sense not merely of speaking the truth but *demonstrating* the truth through our lifestyle and behavior in every area of life.

Mutual Exhortation—

An important ingredient in Continuous Revival

Norman Grubb

[Decades ago, when he wrote the small but power-packed book *Continuous Revival*, Norman Grubb was the worldwide director of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. W.E.C. was and is a cutting-edge missionary movement. Outstanding pioneer missionary C. T. Studd began it in the late 1800s. The book is still available: order online from “CLC USA - titles in print”. It has 46 pages and costs \$4.99. To be honest with you, the only folks who will fully benefit from the following chapter are those who walk with the Lord in a way described in the 2nd sentence that follows – where the earlier chapters are reviewed.--avw]

There remains one further stage in revival fellowship, and a most important one. *We have seen* [in earlier chapters]: 1) walking with Jesus step by step; 2) two-way brokenness; 3) cups running over--and when they don't run over, walking in the light, letting God show sin as sin; then 4) confession and cleansing in the blood; and finally, 5) as God gives opportunity, giving glory to God by testifying to His dealings with sin and to the power of the blood, bringing liberation to the one who testifies, and joy and often conviction to the hearts of the hearers. The one remaining point is *mutual exhortation*.

The early church was first and foremost a fellowship. They “continued in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship.” They broke bread from house to house. When they met in worship, it was the very opposite of our present church services, divided into two categories of preacher and preached-to. It was a living fellowship-in-action. All took part, and there was such a flow of the Spirit through

the believers that Paul had to write words of restraint. "How is it, brethren? When ye come together, *every one of you* hath a psalm, hath a doctrine ..." Then he urged them to orderliness, and said that if while one was giving his word, another arose with a desire to say something, let the first sit down and give place to him, for "the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets."

But today we have to persuade people to say something, if occasionally we do have a time to open fellowship. Paul had to persuade them to keep silent and give the other fellow a chance. We have now replaced fellowshiping by preaching in our modern church life, and the reason is not hard to find. Fellowshiping necessitates a real flow of life in the fellowship, for each has to be ready to contribute his share of what the Lord is really saying to him. Preaching is an easy way out for a not-too-living fellowship. Appoint the preacher and let him find the messages; we can sit still and take or leave what we hear, as we please!

Probably the best balance was found in early Methodism, where John Wesley laid down that beside the preaching and teaching meetings, there must be a weekly class-meeting which was on a strictly fellowship basis, and all who attended were required to tell of the Lord's personal dealings that week, whether concerning sins, or answers to prayer, or opportunities of witness.

But in the Scriptures it is also obvious that an important part of this fellowship was to be mutual exhortation, not just public exhortation by a preacher, but one exhorting the other. In Hebrews it distinctly says that the reason for such exhortation is to keep each other from becoming "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13), in other words lest cups should cease to run over and we should not even recognize it. And it was to be daily exhortation! The same is said in 10:24, 25, about public gatherings. The phrase usually quoted as a summons to attend weekly preaching services, "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together," is actually used, not for preaching, but of mutual exhortation, and "so much more, as ye see the day approaching." In James also we are exhorted to mutual confession of sin, so that we may pray one for another (5:16).

In Africa I found these instructions being obeyed in all simplicity, and perhaps that one thing has contributed more than any other to the spread of revival [the East African revival during the mid-1900s]. Those simple revived believers use often unusual boldness in questioning into the lives of those they contact, as to what is their real spiritual condition and experience of daily victory. Of course, such boldness has also met with intense opposition, and often also criticism, where the questioning might not always have been wise --

instead of thankfulness that a few are bold when most of the church is asleep! But it has certainly resulted in a marvelous spread of revival and salvation among saved and unsaved. It has had another healthy effect also. It allows the Spirit, not just some outstanding man, to have leadership. Having accepted among themselves this healthy principle of mutual exhortation, no man or leader is put on some pedestal where he cannot be approached or questioned. All are brethren around one Father, and if the very chiefest among those brethren is seen by the spirit of discernment to be unwise in leadership or to be off color spiritually, others will walk in the light with him.

In other words, the standard is that all want to be the best for Jesus, all recognize how easily deceived we are by Satan and the flesh, so all desire their brethren to "exhort" them, if things are seen in their walk which are not "the highest." Such exhortations are not easy either to receive or give. To receive them with humility and a readiness to be constantly adjusted before God is one proof of continuing revival, for where we are not revived, we almost certainly resent such challenges and reveal hurt self. To give them in grace and faithfulness costs perhaps even more. We are so easily tempted to "let well alone" or say, "It is not my business," and so forth, because we recognize that to bring such a challenge might disturb the peace, or disrupt a friendship.

But in revival we see we are our brother's keeper, not for his sake, but for Jesus' sake. When a brother is not on top spiritually, it wounds the Lord Jesus, it grieves Him, it hinders the working of His Spirit; therefore it is part of our duty to Him to be faithful to the brother. Not to be so is sin. Of course such challenging has to be deeply in the Spirit, that is to say, its source must be godly concern for the brother in question, and the subtle danger watched against using such a method to "put a brother right," or even "to get our own back." Thus, it can only proceed from brokenness in ourselves. Indeed often the only God-sealed approach may be, not the pointing finger of accusation towards the brother, but back to ourselves, perhaps telling him of some reaction in ourselves caused by his conduct, which we have had to take to the cross, or perhaps telling him how on some occasion God had to deal with us through another brother's faithfulness. The golden rule, as it applies to challenging, is Matt. 7: 12, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Do We STIFLE The Holy Spirit?

James Denney

[Paul wrote, "Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings; prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:19-21, ASV). Newer versions translate the first of those exhortations as follows: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Do not smother the Holy Spirit. Never damp the fire of the Spirit." A related idea is found in Rom. 12:11. Christians should be "fervent in spirit"--that is: "Keep the fires of the Spirit burning; be aglow with the Spirit." A noted Bible teacher at the beginning of the 20th century wrote the following challenge based on these passages. —Editor]

When the Holy Spirit descended on the church at Pentecost "there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them"; and their lips were open to declare the mighty works of God. A man who has received this great gift is described as fervent, literally, *boiling* with the Spirit. The new birth in those early days was a new birth; it kindled in the soul thoughts and feelings to which it had hitherto been strange. It brought with it the consciousness of new powers; a new vision of God; a new love of holiness; a new insight into the Holy Scriptures, and into the meaning of man's life; often a new power of ardent, passionate speech.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul describes an early Christian congregation. There was not one silent among them. When they came together every one had a psalm, a revelation, a prophecy, an interpretation. The manifestation of the Spirit had been given to each one to *profit* withal; and on all hands the spiritual fire was ready to flame forth. Conversion to the Christian faith, the acceptance of the apostolic Gospel, was not a thing which made little difference to men. It convulsed their whole nature to its depth. They were never the same again; they were new creatures, with a new life in them, all fervor and flame.

A state so unlike nature, in the ordinary sense of the term, was sure to have its inconveniences. The Christian, even when he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit was still a man; and as likely as not a man who had to struggle against vanity, folly, ambition and selfishness of all kinds. His enthusiasm might even seem, in the first instance, to aggravate, instead of removing, his natural faults. It might drive him to speak--for in the early church anybody who pleased might speak-- when it would have been better for him to be silent. It might lead him to break out in prayer or praise or exhortation, in a

style which made the wise sigh. And for those reasons the wise, and such as thought themselves wise, would be apt to discourage the exercise of spiritual gifts altogether. "Contain yourself," they would say to the man whose heart burned within him, and who was restless till the flame could leap out. "Contain yourself; exercise a little self-control. It is unworthy of a rational being to be carried away in this fashion."

No doubt situations like this were common in the church at Thessalonica. They are produced inevitably by difference of age and of temperament. The old and the phlegmatic are a natural and providential counterweight to the young and sanguine. But the wisdom which comes of experience and of temperament has its disadvantages as compared with fervor of spirit. It is cold and unenthusiastic; it cannot propagate itself; it cannot set fire to anything and spread. And because it is under this incapacity of kindling the souls of men into enthusiasm it is forbidden to pour cold water on such enthusiasm when it breaks forth in words of fire. That is the meaning of "Quench not the Spirit." The commandment pre-supposes that the Spirit can be quenched. Cold looks, contemptuous words, silence, studied disregard go a long way to quench it. So does unsympathetic criticism.

Everyone knows that a fire smokes most when it is newly kindled. But the way to get rid of the smoke is not to pour cold water on the fire, but to let it burn itself clear. If you are wise enough you can even help it to burn itself clear by rearranging the materials, or securing a better draught; but the wisest thing most people can do when the fire has got hold is to let it alone; and that is also the wise course for most when they meet with a disciple whose zeal burns like fire. Very likely the smoke hurts their eyes; but the smoke will soon pass by; and it may well be tolerated in the meantime for the sake of the heat. For this apostolic precept takes for granted that fervor of spirit, a Christian enthusiasm for what is good, is the best thing in the world. It may be untaught and inexperienced; it may have all its mistakes to make; it may be wonderfully blind to the limitations which the stern necessities of life put upon the generous hopes of man. But it is of God. It is expansive; it is contagious; it is worth more as a spiritual force than all the wisdom of the world.

I have hinted at ways in which the Spirit is quenched. It is sad to reflect that from one point of view the history of the church is a long series of rebellions of the Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is," the Apostle tells us elsewhere, "there is liberty." But liberty in a society has its dangers. It is, to a certain extent, at war with order; and the guardians of order are not apt to be considerate of it. Hence it came to pass that at a very early period, and in the interests of good

order, the freedom of the Spirit was summarily suppressed in the church.

“The gift of ruling,” it has been said, “like Aaron’s rod, seemed to swallow up the other gifts.” The rulers of the church became a class entirely apart from its ordinary members, and all exercise of spiritual gifts for the building up of the church was confined to them. Nay, the monstrous idea was originated, and taught as a dogma, that they alone were the custodians of the grace and truth of the gospel. Only through them could men come into contact with the Holy Spirit. In plain English, the Spirit was quenched when Christians met for worship. One great extinguisher was placed over the flame that burned in the hearts of the brethren; it was not allowed to show itself; it must not disturb, by its eruption in praise or prayer or fiery exhortation, the decency and order of divine service....

That was the condition to which Christian worship was reduced at a very early period; and it is unhappily the condition in which, for the most part, it subsists at this moment. Do you think we are gainers by it? I do not believe it. It has always come from time to time to be intolerable. The Montanists of the second century, the heretical sects of the middle ages, the Independents and Quakers of the English Commonwealth, the Methodist lay preachers, the Salvation Army, the Plymouth Brethren and the evangelistic associations of our own day – all these are in various degrees the protest of the Spirit, and its right and necessary protest, against the authority which would quench it, and by quenching it impoverish the church.

Church Attendance - How Many Times a Week?

Edward Fudge

A gracEmail subscriber asks whether his family does wrong by not attending church every Sunday night and Wednesday night, although they never miss Sunday morning worship. Both parents work full time, they are sometimes traveling, and they believe their family time together at home is as important as going to church meetings on Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

* * *

There is no command in the Bible for Christians to assemble any given number of times weekly, or even on any particular day. From the first century onward, however, most Gentile believers in Jesus have met each Sunday in honor of Christ’s resurrection on that day and I believe that has the approval of God. Motivated by inward fer-

vor or external circumstances, the earliest Christians sometimes met every day (Acts 2:46). When people share a commitment to Christ and a mutual love, they want to be together!

The author of Hebrews urged Jewish believers in Jesus not to stop their practice of assembling with their fellow-Messianists (Heb. 10:25). The admonition here is literally not to be "leaving down and out" ("abandoning") the "extra synagogue" ("assembling"). Probably these Jewish believers were meeting on the Sabbath at the synagogue with other Jews as usual, then remaining for a special time together ("extra synagogue") with those Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah. From this passage, we learn the importance of our encouraging each other regarding our common faith and life also, in view of the atonement Jesus has accomplished and the access it has opened for us to God (Heb. 10:1-24).

If our assemblies on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights have that purpose and result, we cheat ourselves by not participating in them, and rob others of encouragement we might give them. If the assemblies do not accomplish any of that, perhaps we can be instrumental in improving them so that they do. I encourage you to sincerely ask God to give you wisdom and direction, then to search your own heart and spiritual priorities. If you see that they are set on godly goals and still conclude on particular occasions that family time is more important than time with "church family," I cannot judge you for that and do not believe anyone else should do so either.

The *Maternal* Side of God

Darren Johnson

Surveys have shown that Mother's Day is the third most celebrated holiday in America. Only Christmas and Easter are more popular. It's no surprise that Mother's Day ranks just behind the highest holy days on the Christian calendar. William Makepeace Thackeray spoke for many of us when he said, "*Mother is the name of God in the lips and hearts of little children.*" Mother is the first name we learn to praise, the first Bible we ever read, the first (and likely the best) preacher we'll ever hear!

Have you ever stopped to think that perhaps motherhood is not only a *divine calling* but also a *divine attribute*? That God is, in some sense, just like a mother?

When God decided to create beings capable of reflecting his image and bearing his likeness, he didn't create Adam and then take a nap. It wasn't good for man to be alone. Alone he could not reflect the love of God. "*So male and female He created them*" (Genesis 1:27). The Triune God seeks to express his loving nature in relationships between man and woman, father and mother. Perhaps that is why the fifth commandment, "*Honor your father and mother,*" comes immediately after four commandments focusing on proper relationships with God (Exodus 20:12). It is through the holy partnership of father and mother that children first learn to honor their Creator.

Why is it, then, that so many of us are loathe to speak of God's "motherly" attributes? We call upon God as Father in our prayers, and rightly so. For we are his children. And Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our Father...*" But if our language and thoughts about God are exclusively framed in masculine terms—*King, Master, Lord of Hosts, Omnipotent Father*—do we not run the risk of ignoring what are traditionally considered the more feminine aspects of God's nature—*Helper, Comforter, Nurturer, Mother*?

Some of you are probably getting worried at this point. Am I suggesting that we change the Lord's Prayer to read "*Our Mother who art in heaven*" and turn the Book of Hebrews into the Book of *Shebrews*? Not at all! But if we limit our reflection upon God to just one set of metaphors, we lose something. And our faith in God can become grossly distorted.

The great reformer Martin Luther grew up believing that God was a stern, authoritarian figure, ready to punish him for the slightest infraction. He virtually lived in the confessional, seeking absolution for his sins. One day the confessor asked Martin if he loved God. "*Love God,*" he exclaimed. "*I hate God!*" When you consider that his was the predominant view of God in the Middle Ages, no wonder people began to elevate Mary in their devotion, almost to the level of Deity. They were looking for a motherly tenderness not found in the angry and distant God of popular piety. The answer, as Luther discovered, was not to deify Mary, but to reconsider the Fatherhood of God in light of those scriptures that speak of God just like a "Mother." And there are quite a few....

A Mother Creates Order out of Chaos

Several Old Testament passages describe God's creative works in the language of the maternity ward. Job 38:8 reads, "*Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb?*" Later, in verse 29, the Lord again asks, "*From whose*

womb comes the ice? And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth?" As only a mother can know the pain of childbirth, only God can fathom the mysteries of creation. It was God, not "Mother Nature," who gave birth to wisdom before the foundation of the earth (Proverbs 8:34-35), and it was God's Spirit who hovered over the primeval waters (Genesis 1:2). In the Hebrew language, "Spirit" is always a feminine noun. No wonder, then, that throughout the Scriptures the Spirit takes on the responsibilities of motherhood: giving us birth from above, comforting us in our weakness, nurturing us into Christlike maturity (John 3:5-8; Romans 8:26; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). The word "hovering" in Genesis 1:2 also evokes a motherly comparison. Like a mother bird hovering over her nestlings, the Spirit brooded over the watery chaos until an orderly cosmos was born. Creation out of chaos—isn't that the essence of motherhood? My mother is to our family what God's Spirit is to Creation. She's the oil that keeps everything running (Psalm 104:29-30). Growing up, I saw that our household could function pretty well when Dad got sick or when one of us boys was under the weather. But if Mom was out of commission, 9-1-1 had better be on the speed dial!

As youngsters, we habitually took our mothers for granted. We overlooked all that they endured and sacrificed just for us. Yet day after day, there was Mom, chin-deep in the chaos: cleaning the grime off our faces, healing our bruised knees and broken spirits, filling us with the steadfast love that leads to maturity, ministering to us in the Spirit and image of God.

A Mother Offers Comfort and Compassion

When contemplating the tender mercies of God, the Hebrew prophets sometimes drew upon their childhood memories of Mom. Isaiah 40-66, in particular, contains some wonderful snapshots of God as a mother. The theme of this section is expressed in 40:1, "*Comfort, comfort my people.*" The Jewish remnant was returning from Babylonian exile to a homeland devastated by war. Their spirits yearned for comfort. And who better to comfort them than a loving Mother.

The Lord declares in Isaiah 42:14, "*For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.*" This is not a picture of God I recall seeing in Sunday School: God, feet in the stirrups, in the throes of labor, ready to "deliver" a people! The childbirth metaphor continues in Isaiah 46:3-4: "*Listen to me, O house of Jacob...you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age, even until your hairs are gray, I will carry you!*"

That reminds me of a popular Mother's Day card that Hallmark released for grown-up children. It reads, "Now that we have a mature, adult relationship, there's something I'd like to tell you. You're still the first person I think of when I fall down and go boom!" Years of care and nurturing forge a bond of love between mother and child that time itself can never weaken.

The same is true of God's love for us. In Isaiah 49:15, the Lord asks, "*Can a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you.*" The Hebrew for "compassion" derives from the root-word "womb." What better way to depict God's maternal affection! As one commentator observes,

God shows how strong is his concern for his people (by) comparing himself to a mother, whose love for her offspring is so strong and ardent, as to leave far behind a father's love. ...What amazing affection does a mother feel toward her offspring, which she cherishes in her bosom, suckles on her breast, and watches over with tender care, so that she passes sleepless nights, wears herself out by continued anxiety, and forgets herself.

The radical feminist who wrote these words was none other than John Calvin in 1550! It was not his intent to diminish the love of a father, but simply to show that God's love for us is sometimes best expressed in a mother's comforting embrace (cf. Ps. 131:2; Hos. 11:1-4). Thus, the Book of Isaiah ends with the tender promise that God will comfort Israel "*as a mother comforts her children*" (66:13).

A Mother Is Fiercely Protective of Her Children

We've compiled an impressive list of scriptures on the motherhood of God. But we've yet to address one of the key attributes of motherhood. From the animal kingdom to the spiritual kingdom, a mother is always fiercely protective of her young.

I remember how out of sorts Mom would get during my brother's pee-wee basketball games. Anytime he'd get hacked and the refs didn't blow the whistle, she was up on her feet, yelling and giving them what for. Never mind that my brother was twice the size of the kids defending him and threw around his weight as good as anyone. That was her son out there! Instantly, my mild-mannered Mom morphed into the female version of Billy Martin.

Surely the rest of you mothers have never done anything so embarrassing? Of course you have: it's your maternal instinct! Or,

better yet, it's the nature of God surfacing unexpectedly in your fiercely protective love!!

In Hosea 13:8, the prophet compares God to a mother bear who's lost her cubs and is ready to go on a mauling rampage! Switching species, the Old Testament often pictures God as a mother eagle watching over her hatchlings (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 32:10-11; Psa. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:5; Is. 31:5). But my favorite passage on God's maternal protection comes from the lips of Jesus. Nearing the outskirts of Jerusalem, Jesus foresaw the devastation that would befall the holy city for rejecting God's covenant of peace. Moved with pity, he cried out, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I would have gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings*" (Luke 13:34). It's a poignant text. But we often miss its full impact because we are not familiar with the agricultural background. As N.T. Wright observes,

The image of the hen and the chicks envisages a farmyard fire, in which the hen gathers her brood under her wings for safety. When the fire is over, she may have been scorched to death, but the chicks will be alive, protected under her wings. ...This image indicates that Jesus believed he would suffer the fate that was hanging over Jerusalem; indeed, that he desired to take it upon himself so that she might avoid it.

Like a mother who foregoes her own safety to protect the children she loves, Jesus offered himself as a ransom for many. You don't need a Ph.D. in Christology to appreciate the sacrificial love that led Him to the cross. You just need a mother!

Every year on Mother's Day, in worship assemblies the world over, countless stories of unsung sacrifice are waiting to be told. Stories of mothers who have set aside promising careers to care for a child with special needs. Of mothers who have taken in foster children and cared for them as their own flesh and blood. Of young women who could easily have chosen to terminate their pregnancies but chose, instead, the noble calling of motherhood.

Your acts of courage, compassion, and selfless love may never make headline news, but on this day your sons and daughters "*rise up and call you blessed*" (Prov. 31:28). For we see the image of God reflected in you.

William Thackeray was only half right when he said that "*Mother is the name of God in the lips and hearts of little children.*" There are also some grown-up children for whom God will always be "Mother."

JESUS TOUCHED LEPERS

Leroy Garrett

To be a leper in the ancient world was abysmal terror. His disease was seen as not only intractable and incurable, but contagious. The virulent skin formed scabs and peeled away, leaving unsightly and painful open sores. The affliction was often consummate, covering the victim's body from head to foot. He was banished from society. Despised and rejected, he often lived in colonies with others similarly afflicted. He was untouchable. Even relatives kept their distance. When they brought food or clothing, they would leave it at a distance.

The disease was so dreaded among the ancient Hebrews that they legislated meticulous regulations to control it, as Leviticus 13-14 indicates. If one showed the slightest sign of the disease he was isolated for a week for observation, and then another week if there was still doubt. Once the priest, who served as diagnostician, determined he was leprous, he became a marked man -- for life! -- unless there was clear evidence of a cure. He was to wear torn clothing and disheveled hair to mark him as "unclean," and he was to cover his upper lip. If anyone inadvertently came near him, he was to shout, "Unclean, unclean!" The Leviticus law ruled that "being unclean, he would live alone and live outside the camp." He was the ultimate reject of society.

It is not surprising that we find lepers throughout the Bible, including instances of their being healed by God's power. And since they brought to Jesus "all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils," it is not surprising that he would encounter those afflicted with society's most dreaded disease. But the leper had a problem approaching a noted healer. If he dared to draw near where others were he might be stoned. Only Luke (17:11-19) tells the story of a colony of lepers, ten in number, that approached Jesus, but they stayed at a comfortable distance from him and shouted, "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us." Jesus called back to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." This he said because only the priest could officially pronounce them clean and restore them to their families and society.

On the way to the priests they were healed, all ten of them. One of them -- a Samaritan -- came back to thank Jesus. Luke tells us that "he praised God to the top of his voice and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus and thanked him." This is where Jesus said, "Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they?" Jesus was

impressed that it was a lowly Samaritan -- a foreigner -- who had returned to praise God and offer thanks.

While this is an impressive case of Jesus healing lepers, it was from a distance. Would Jesus actually render himself ritually unclean by *touching* a leper? All three of the synoptic gospels tell the story of this actually happening. R. H. Lightfoot, the noted New Testament scholar of generations back, esteemed this story as the most impressive of all the New Testament. It has all the marks of profound drama.

As Mark relates the story in 2:40-45, a leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." *If you are willing* is a cry of desperation. He knew that Jesus had healed others, but would he bother with a despised leper? While his faith was strong -- Jesus only had to be willing -- he saw it as understandable if Jesus excluded such rejects as lepers.

Jesus felt compassion for him, and he responded in kind, "I am willing. Be cleansed." In relating this, Mark says that Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. What drama! A rabbi -- a teacher of Israel -- touching a leper! It was not only a no-no in the society in which he lived, but a breach of the law. He rendered himself unclean. As he had done before in healing lepers, he could have done it without defiling himself. Jesus -- who came to show us what the kingdom of heaven is about -- touched a despised leper.

It is one more instance of the radical character of the kingdom of God and the cost of discipleship. We claim as Christians to be *followers* of Jesus -- that is what discipleship means -- but do we touch lepers?

I'm not sure who the lepers of our society would be. The homeless who sleep in doorways or under bridges? Prostitutes? Drug addicts who poke themselves with needles? Or maybe the drug pusher? The chap in school who has poor eyesight and wears thick glasses and who is harassed and bullied to the degree that he commits suicide? The black man in the nursing home that diabetes has rendered both legless and sightless who asks you to pray that he might die? Those wadded up in wheelchairs waiting to die, and who have an offending odor? The Muslim or Hindu neighbor? Those with AIDS? Those who sin differently from us?

Let's face it. We claim to be followers of one who touched lepers. Jesus was a radical in his society. He would likely be more comfortable sitting with those just referred to than with us in our

cushioned pews on Sunday morning. We don't do things like touch lepers!

I think one of my Harvard professors understood this. When I asked Henry Cadbury, noted New Testament scholar, what would happen to Jesus should he return to our society today, he said he would be killed just as he was before. When I asked him who would do it, he said it would be the church, just as before. After all, Jesus did things like touch lepers.

The prophet Amos understood this when he heard God say, "Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:23-24). Justice before ritual! Righteousness before "religion"!

An aged woman, longtime resident of a nursing home, taught me something about touching those who are hurting. One day when I was calling on her, I noticed a woman sitting in the foyer sobbing. Her daughter was at the desk signing her in to the nursing home. "I don't want to be here; I want to go home," she moaned. Her daughter sought to comfort her, "Mother, you are not able to care for yourself any longer. We will be coming to see you." The mother kept sobbing. I paused to watch all this, and had the urge to offer comfort, but I felt helpless, not knowing what to say.

Once in the room of my friend, I told her what I had just seen. I asked her, "Mabel, you've been here all these years, and you know what its like. What would you say to the poor soul out there that doesn't want to be here? She looked at me as if I didn't understand. "Leroy, there's nothing to say to her," she said.

She added, "I would cry with her."

Parable: An Unfruitful Tree and its Caring Keeper

Luke 13:6-9

Jim Girdley

One day a man was walking through his vineyard, with the keeper of that vineyard, inspecting the trees. Since this was a vineyard, they were looking for something specific. The trees provided wood, beauty, and even shelter but that was not the purpose of their walk. No, they were looking for one thing – fruit. And they came

upon one tree which had none. Now, this was not the first time the owner had come upon this tree. The account states that this was the third year that he had taken this stroll. A patient man, he had been waiting for harvest time. However, his patience had a limit. Alas, the tree was not bearing fruit and the owner said to the keeper sternly, "Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" In other words, this tree is worthless. It is wasting the ground in which it is planted. Or, as we sometimes hear someone say, "What a waste of life!"

However, the tree had an advocate – someone who cared. The keeper of the vineyard. If the keeper were like some we hear of today, he might have become defensive and said, "Hey, I'm so busy with all the work and responsibility that I cannot look after every single detail." Or he may have played the blame game stating, "I've done all I can – it's not my fault." Or, he might have complained "Oh great! Cut down a tree – just one more thing I have to do." But no. The goodly keeper reveals his heart as he says to the master, "Sir, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it." The keeper, who knew his trees, wanted just *one more growing season* to work with the little tree. What an optimist he must have been and what a love he demonstrated. Three years of work produced nothing. What made him think that another year would make any difference? In fact, if he would have just complied with the master's wishes, it would have been one less tree to deal with and perhaps more free time for him. Nevertheless, the tree was his. No, he did not own it, nor the ground in which it grew, nor the fruit which it might produce. However, he labored with the trees, he knew the trees, they were his life – his responsibility.

There are many "trees" in the body of Christ who "grow" but are not bearing fruit, as they ought. Our Master walks among us looking for fruit, and far too often He finds "nothing but leaves." But thank God for the keepers of the vineyard – the caregivers. Those who work and toil and intercede for the barren trees. Those who "care" with their time and "dig" with their efforts and "fertilize" with their prayers and "water" with their tears.

For whom are you a dresser? For whom will you boldly go before God and say, "Please, one more year!?" Whom are you willing to work with, and work for, that they might bear fruit? For whom are you investing your heart, talents and gifts? Prayer and work – the dynamic combination of a Christ-like servant.

Does the tree produce fruit? We are not told how this story ends. The dresser simply states, "If it bears fruit, fine!" [You can almost feel his excitement.] "If not, then cut it down." [You can almost feel

his pain.] The dresser simply asks for the opportunity. Whatever the year may bring to the tree or the dresser, he is making a commitment – not to the outcome but to the process. And that is all He requires from us. Seeing the opportunity, making a commitment, and working the process.

One last thought. Who has been a "dresser" for you? I wonder how many times He has looked down from glory and said, "Enough! Cut it down." And how many times some loving Christian has gone to Him and said, "Just one more time. I'll work and I'll pray and I'll give – I will do anything!" And they do!

Let us determine today that we will become attentive to and active in the lives of other believers. Let us do the good work of a dresser. Who knows what fruit will be borne!

[Jim Girdley is the father of James Girdley, preaching minister at Highland Community Church, Louisville.]

VOICES from the FIELDS

Dan Wilson June 1, 2004 International Student Teams

As Dickens put it, these are the best of times and these are the worst of times. As for the best of times, June is upon us and as usual that means Project Friendship mission teams are getting ready to leave for St. Petersburg, Russia. Our first team, Valley Christian School, leaves on June 14 and will be there for three weeks. Please pray for them as they will be in a camp that is new to us, and as far as we know, a camp that has never had a team like ours. If that is the case then this team could have the joy of sharing the Gospel with 300 orphans, deaf kids and kids from poor families who may have never heard it before.

For the first time in seven years I will be heading over to St. Petersburg *after* our first team has already arrived. Masha will be coordinating the Valley team for the first two weeks without her trusty (okay, maybe a little dangerous) Driver Dan. Please pray for her safety in traveling and for God to grant her extra strength and wisdom. I will be leaving for St. Pete on June 28 and returning to Louisville on August 10.

Our teams this summer are high in quality but unfortunately, these are the worst of times as far as numbers of teams. There are only four teams going this summer, down from nine last summer. With the transitions going on in our ministry this has made it possi-

ble for me to focus on getting our processes switched over to run mostly from Colorado Springs, but it is sad to know that hundreds of Russian children will not have a ministry team working in their camps this summer. My hope and prayer is that we will see a sharp increase in the number of Project Friendship teams in Russia next summer as a result of our having improved our recruiting process.

This Sunday through Thursday, June 6-10, Betty Ann Schreiner (our Latin America Facilitator) and I will be in Colorado Springs. On Thursday we will be presenting our mission program to the directors of three ACSI international regions. If God so leads us, we plan to start sending teams to their regions of the world starting next year. Please pray that God will give us wisdom.

[ACSI is the Association of Christian Schools International:
www.acsi.org/~stm]

Martin Brooks [Almost anywhere in the world] June 2004

I did not get a newsletter out in the last two months. I traveled to Ireland to visit one of our workers there who is battling cancer, then to London to organize a new work in Algeria. In Morocco we viewed the earthquake destruction, visited the team there, and formulated a plan to respond. When I returned to Louisville, e-mails were backlogged, some of which were pretty important.

I was home for a week then back to London for a meeting about the work in Libya, then on to Bosnia to do the yearly visit and evaluation of the Italy team. When I returned to the States we had a four day security conference I had organized to train our mission leaders on how to respond to a kidnapping and what policies we needed to beef up to be prepared. Again, e-mails were backlogged as team leaders around the world write asking advice and reporting progress. On a personal note, my oldest son, Kirk, graduated from high school and my family was feeling a bit neglected from all my travels. [Par.] As I write this, Pre-field Orientation is in progress during which we give a week of intensified training to 50 summer interns headed out to various points across the globe. The visas for the Afghanistan workers are stuck in Washington (the planes leave in 4 days), and the China crew is wondering if they should risk taking religious materials into the country. Also this week an ammunition stockpile exploded in Iraq next to our workers. They are okay, but the stress level is climbing. I have purchased my next tickets to Afghanistan for July 13, and a trip to Ghana and Tanzania had to be cancelled due to lack of funds.

God at Work: Reach Asians in Africa – Over 30,000 migrant Chinese workers are in Algeria. It may be illegal to proselytize the local people in China and in Algeria, but Algeria does not seem to mind Christians working among the Chinese in Algeria. Algeria also has the **largest group of Muslim-background Christian believers** that we know of anywhere. Remember Henry Blackaby's teaching to **"find what God is doing and join in"**? The Lord is moving in Algeria, and we have invitations to be a part of this work. We just need workers.

When you pray

*I will be traveling to Afghanistan July 13-26. Please pray for Susan and the kids as I travel.

*I will be re-writing our security protocols [policies and procedures] in the coming weeks.

*Protection for workers around the world especially in Iraq as a new government asserts control.

*My oldest son is starting college in Fall, and is considering marriage.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

I've always believed that we are, each of us, put here for a reason, that there is a...divine plan for all of us." --Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004.)

Don't See This Every Day! "More girls push retailers to see modest clothes." Many youngsters are frustrated by the profusion of racy teenage clothing, according to Buzz Marketing - a New Jersey based firm that compiles feedback from teen advisors. Some have written to complain about the excess of tight, immodest clothes, and the clothing companies are listening.

Cherry St. Church of Christ (New Albany) Revival meeting July 11-16 with Bro. Sonny Childs.

Lilly Dale Church of Christ (Ind) Revival meeting July 31-August 4 with Nick Marsh.

Coming in August (2-5) is the Kentucky-Indiana Fellowship. "God's Word Deals with Today's Problems" is the theme and everyone is encouraged to join in this time of fellowship.

"One Nation Under God" can stay for now! Fifty years to the day after Congress added the words "under God" to the Pledge of

Allegiance, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled to allow the words to remain. Oh, that we would be "one nation under God."

Church of Christ Worldwide (Lexington, KY) continues to forward designated funds to various mission works around the world. Acknowledgments are made with a monthly financial statement to those who give. We appreciate very much those who give and continue to show their love and support for "laborers together with us" in taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Contact us at:

Church of Christ Worldwide
P.O. Box 54842
Lexington, KY 40555
(859) 269-1312
bhill40482@aol.com

Woodland Bible Camp (Indiana) is celebrating 50 years on Saturday, September 11th. Join others and plan to stay for Sr. Citizen's Week (12-16).

Stone-Campbell encyclopedia to be debuted at bicentennial celebration at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, June 26. On June 28, 1804, Barton W. Stone and five other ministers of the Presbyterian Church signed the Last Will and Testament, which declared freedom from creeds and the clerical system and called for union 'with the body of Christ at large.' This document is considered the beginning point of the Stone-Campbell Movement, which brought about the Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and Christian Churches." Although the encyclopedia will be close to 900 pages in length, the reference book will be relatively inexpensive at approximately \$45. It appears in Eerdman's fall catalog.

Another Helper Back in March we named several people who help in various ways to put out W&W. But one we omitted was **Carmelita Ocana**. This Filipina sister converts articles which are "hard copy" (i.e., not written on computer & sent to us that way) into computer-ese (word processor form). Then I can edit them easily and George Fulda can print them easily (if our computers work right, that is). Carmelita either "scans" the articles electronically into her computer, or types them out on her p-c. Her work saves me hours of tedious work. Thank the Lord for all who have and use what Paul called the spiritual gift of "helps." - AVW

Letter from a Friend: The last few issues of the Word and Work have been among the most excellent I have read. The treatment of spiritual gifts was well balanced and dealt honestly with the scriptures.

The most recent issue on unity [March] came at just the right time for me. I have been reading writings by Leroy Garrett lately. I also recently had a Church of Christ minister want to meet with me for a Bible study. It turned out he didn't want to study the scriptures at all, but rather wanted me to conform to his theological system. He assured me if I didn't conform, the Bible made it clear that my eternal future was at risk. He also made it clear that [our congregation] was an apostate church. That meeting left me feeling less than willing to seek unity, but your "unity" emphasis in the Word and Work was very convicting. The Lord really used it to help me search my own heart. I don't know where things will go with this minister, but I know I need to be willing.

Comments by a reader re: Christian workers who fell far but were not discovered for a long time:

There are certain avenues that Satan uses so easily these days since society (and the church) have opened the doors so very wide [to temptation & compromise]. It seems we have forgotten that repentance means turning away. Steve Camp sings many songs that haunt me in my half-hearted fight against my own sinfulness. In one he sang,

"the cost of real devotion seems so foreign to our eyes."

I am firmly convinced that if we do not "confess our sins one to another," we easily slide into hidden sin. And how often do we really do that? We put all kinds of conditions around it to protect ourselves from that kind of exposure. But the Lord will burn away the dross--here or there. His holiness requires it.

SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

SCHEDULE of CLASSES for FALL 2004:

Romans & Galatians	Mon. 9:00 - 12:00	Mike Abbot
Pentateuch (5 books of Moses)	Mon. 1:00 - 4:00	Jerry Carmichael
The Work of the Church - 1	Tues. 9:00 - 11:00	Bud Ridgeway
Christian Marriage and Home	Tues. 1:00 - 4:00	Benny Hill
Methods of Bible Study	Tues. 6:30 - 8:30	Jim Gillaspie

All these classes will be taught at Buechel Church of Christ, 2105 Buechel Bank Road, near Bardstown Road, Louisville KY 40218. Telephone 502-499-0724. Each credit hour @ \$25.00. Audit @ \$12.50 per hour. Senior citizens accepted tuition free so long as space is available

Study to deepen your knowledge of the Lord and His Word. Train so you can serve Him better, as disciple, family member, Bible teacher, deacon, elder, preacher, or cross-cultural missionary.