

Pastors' Conference

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Pork Therapy at The Bay of Pigs

Luke 8:26-39

By Calvin Miller

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INTRODUCTION

Miss Petunia was a sow we once owned. One very hot July, during my Oklahoma adolescence, our old sow died in the hoghouse. The hoghouse had never smelled very good when Miss Petunia was alive. But by the time she had been dead for two days. . . well, it is too soon after lunch and you really don't want to know about it.

On the fourth evening of her death, it was clear that she would have to be removed, all 400 pounds of her, from the hoghouse. My brother-in-law, who owned the farm where I grew up, usually took care of things like this, but the July heat and the stench being what they were, he felt that God was leading me to be responsible for getting Miss Petunia out of the hoghouse. I muffled my face in a dish-towel and crawled up to the hoghouse door and peered in. I could only say, as Mary of Bethany once said, of her brother, Lazarus, "Lord, Lord, *Lordy*, she hath been dead for four days and she stinketh (John 11:39)." The old sow just laid there like an expired sumo wrestler, reeking and swarming with maggots. I gagged, removed myself and tried to think how does one get a four-hundred pound sow out of a hoghouse.

I needed a miracle. I began praying for her immediate resurrection and ascension. My prayer life during those years was not all that effective. So I went and got the tractor and a log chain. I backed the tractor up to the door of the hogshed, that putrid and en-maggoted orifice of hell, and crawled in. I

prayed for Jesus to come and rapture me from the corruption. He came not. I prayed to die. I died not. I cursed my foul existence, scraped aside the maggots and wound the log chain first around Miss Petunia's massive 75-pound head. I then entwined it around one of her rotting flanks, just to make sure it didn't come off. I slipped the flattened link of the chain into the hook and crawled back out of the hoghouse. I got upon the tractor, started it and pulled her out of the shed. I drug Miss Petunia out into the middle of our pasture and unhooked the chain.

When I got back to the house, they wouldn't let me in. They burned my clothes. Some suggested that I should be thrown in the fire with my clothes. I washed, yet I stunk on. I Brillo-padded my hands and steel-wooled my flesh. I dipped myself seven times in Abana and Pharpar, clear rivers of Damascus (2 Kings 5:12); yet I was unwelcome in the house. When you are as clean as you can get and still stink there is nothing more to be done. So, I cried "unclean" and lived among the tombs. Only gradually, after frost, with the approach of winter, was I welcomed back into society.

The event has marked my life. I rarely eat pork. I don't even eat bacon-burgers. I fully understand the Levitical taboos against swine. I only eat things that divideth not the hoof and they must chew the cud a little (Lev. 11:3). When Antiochus profaned the Great Temple of Israel, he did it by offering a pig in sacrifice on the temple altar. It is still called the *Abomination of Desolation* (Dan. 11:31). The Levites knew that nothing that smells as bad as Miss Petunia smelled can ever bless the life. Only those can freely taste a pig who have never laid with a dead one in a hot July hoghouse.

Pigs are bad.

Naturally I have always been intrigued as to why Jesus was so kind to the demons in Luke 8. He could have sent them back to the Abyss (Luke 8:31), but they begged him not to do so. What will the Savior do? Here they are: a gathering of swine, looking like a vast sea of Arkansas football mascots. So Jesus seems to honor the begging demons. Indeed, he is rather lenient on them and sends them into the pigs. The most plausible answer to this is that the demon-infested swine became a witness to Legion that he was indeed healed. If Christ had sent the demons directly back to hell, where they were none-too-anxious to go, the world would have looked ostensibly the same and the demoniac would have had no visible evidence that the demons, which had driven him insane, were really gone. The herd of insane pigs was such a powerful witness to the Demoniac that he was indeed healed. It was a kind of pork therapy that would

have been utterly convincing to the Demoniac. So we must conclude that Jesus sends the demons into the pigs, not to be kind to the demons, but rather to be kind to the Demoniac.

These are the footprints of grace. Legion was insane, unkempt, naked, wild and he smelled bad—everything you would expect to find in a rock star. But how does grace unfold itself . . . ah, the pigs are witness. Jesus loves the alienated, the insane, the naked. And there will be no hiding from His love. Into the graveyards He will come and rout out the unclaimed. I am big on irresistible grace. I don't understand it, but it seems to me for reasons of His own, Jesus will sometimes break upon our existence, rebuke our demons and we shall find ourselves sitting with Him clothed and in our right minds. And only the reeking pile of pigs at the bottom of the precipice will remind us how far He will go to teach us that His healing is complete.

Now that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, the task of rescuing demoniacs has fallen to us. And what do these modern demoniacs look like? They usually look fearsome. Matthew 8:28 tells the same story, only adding to Luke's account that these demoniacs were so violent they made people afraid. And how do we greet the spiritually bereft? **We are afraid of them.** We quail in fear as though they will hurt us somehow.

How well I remember a little lady in our church who would often always pass by me after the sermon and say, "Pastor, would you please come by and talk to my husband about Jesus?" She was a beautiful little woman. Physically she was very attractive and yet she had married one of the Sons of Anak in the valley of Elah. This Philistine was something over six cubits. I am sure that the head of his spear weighed at least 300 shekels. He tied steel for a living. I don't know what that means exactly, but I envisioned him twisting I-bars into shoe-laces. I did not want to witness to him. He made King Kong look like Tatum.

But his wife was so earnest that he be saved, that she prevailed upon me with tears. I wanted him to come to grace just to prove that God really could do anything. Several times when I went by to see him, I would ring the bell praying that he wouldn't be home. Then one Saturday afternoon, my prayer life failed me. He answered the door. He was drinking a can of beer that looked small and thimble-like in his meaty hands. "Yes," he said. That single word *yes* set free the storms of Sinai; my hair was slicked back with his halitosis.

"I'm your wife's pastor, Mr. Godzilla. May I come in?"

"Well . . . uh . . . what for?"

I don't remember exactly what I said. I felt like saying, "Well, I'm tired of living anyway and I haven't won anybody to Christ over three hundred pounds in a long time, and I . . ."

"Well . . . yeah . . . OK . . . come in."

I went in. His wife had been reading my book *The Singer*, which is a book about Jesus. I love that book, but I was forced to watch as he sat his beer can on it, using it like it

was a common coaster. I thought about pointing out the sacrilege, but I looked at his fists and changed my mind.

"Well, Dennis, I'll get right to the point," I said, "If you died right now, do you know for sure you would go to heaven?" It was an easy question for me to ask, since I felt like I might be going any minute.

"I don't know. . . . I don't think so. . . . I think I'd go straight to hell."

"You would?" I was stunned at his honesty. I took courage. I loaded my mental slingshot now with stones.

Goliath began to cry, "Preacher I need to be saved!"

I felt great. . . I wasn't even to that part of the outline yet. I didn't know guys that big had tear ducts. When he started crying, I found a spurt of confidence. I got aggressive, "Now look here, Dennis, you better get right with God right now, before you die and go straight to hell. You know the Bible says that you *gotta* repent. You'd better get on your knees and beg God to forgive you."

"But how?" he asked.

"Let's kneel right here and you can ask God to forgive you." We both knelt. Even on his knees he was tall. We started to pray a believer's prayer when the doorbell rang. I hate Satan. I knew I'd never have the courage to get that far with him again. "You *wanna* get the door, Dennis?" I asked, disconsolately.

"Nope," he blubbered. "I don't know who that is, but it can't be as important as the person I'm about to meet."

Well, Jesus came into his life. He was jubilant! He shot up from his knees in joy and hugged me. His embrace cracked three of my ribs on impact. "Easy big fella," I said, wincing in pain. He was exuberant. I was exuberant. "When can I get baptized?" he asked.

Sheer terror struck me. Suddenly I realized that somebody was going to have to baptize him. I cursed Baptists for not believing in sprinkling.

I promised him we could baptize him in about a month. Usually we baptized within the same month, but things being what they were I knew I had to get ready for this one. I went immediately to the "Y" and began pumping iron. Like Samson in Gaza, I waited four weeks while the hair of my head began to grow again. Then came that fateful Sunday when we walked down into the baptistry together. "Dennis," I said, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, and may God have mercy on our souls." The great Leviathan fell backwards as the waters rose. It was as if Moses had once again dropped the rod of God and the seas rolled over all the host of Egypt. I saw in the collapsing walls of water dead Egyptians and war elephants; iron implements and the wheels of old chariots floated by. And then he stood smiling and it was all over. It wasn't what I would call a graceful, liturgical baptism but it was over. He was childlike and I wondered why I had ever feared the giant.

Evangelism is usually frightful work. Winning souls is a banging of our fears. We taught evangelism in the church for years. On visitation night it was always the same. Every

encounter is always three people standing at a door, ringing a doorbell desperately hoping there's no one home. Inside there are two people desperately wishing they were at someone else's door. Only after a long time did I own up to the truth. It's not just exorcists who are afraid of demoniacs; demoniacs are also afraid of exorcists. It's not just saved people who are afraid of the lost; the lost are also afraid of us as well. Oh, how we need to learn boldness, because in every encounter the Lord will be with us to strengthen us and His courage will make us effective.

But there is another lesson that rises from this bay of pigs. The wild man is depraved. His life makes no sense. In these days in which we minister, hell—for all practical purposes—is gone. People have lost all awareness of transcendence. But they do know they are depraved. They know they are naked. Like this man knew he was naked . . . spiritually and philosophically naked. Even more than size, philosophy makes us afraid. The world's philosophy makes us feel ashamed that we are not sophisticated enough.

In a nation that leads the world in violent crime we are afraid of criticism. Should we be? I think not. On the contrary we ought to be forcing the culture to take a long second look at where it is. We ought to be stressing the sins of our age. I'm 100 percent behind the "True Love Waits" campaigns, but in every sense, the pledge campaigns show just how far the culture has sunk. One church of my acquaintance was proud that 70 of its 150 young people pledged themselves "to wait;" the other 80 made no such pledge. Pledgers and non-pledgers are all in the same youth group. Such is the abysmal state of our either-or morality. In an article of Friday, April 22, 1994, *U.S.A. Today* revealed that many tuxedo shops are now renting tuxedos at one price, complete with the three C's—cummerbunds, cufflinks and condoms. If you don't like the word condom said outloud, it only points to the fact that it is time for a bold new pulpit rhetoric. If it is OK for the CBS news team to say it outloud on television, it's OK for the churches to denounce it outloud from the pulpit. In fact, it is time to abandon the compromising philosophies of Balak and Balaam. It is time to denounce the morality of a depraved nation.

"Oh, pastor," they say, "do you really think we ought to say the 'c' word in the pulpit? It just doesn't go with our new choir robes and our seven-fold amen." When Dan Rather says it right in front of Jane Pauley on the 5:30 news, maybe it would be OK if the preachers quit trying to match our words with our choir robes and just say it outloud. I wonder what Amos would say, or Jeremiah. I wonder what John the Baptist would say. . . . I know he wasn't overly fond of Herod's adultery. With his mind completely gone, the naked Gerasene was less depraved than our culture. Who do we belong to? Is it still God who owns our souls. Whose side are we on?

Michael Fay vandalized 50 cars in a posh part of Singapore last year. Some say Singapore is just too stern on misdemeanors. He was caught by the Singapore police,

fined, given a jail term and then sentenced to six lashes—and I quote *Newsweek*—"with the cane on his buttocks." Fifty-two percent of Americans disapprove of poor Michael's buttocks, but an astounding 38 percent say his buttocks is a good place to settle things. Thirty-eight percent of Americans also say they've been born again. I don't know if there is any correlation between being born again and caning, *but my mother was and she did*. But says the attorney for Little Mickey, he was diagnosed with A.D.D. in 1989. A.D.D., *Attention Deficit Disorder*, is the new buzz-word. (*Newsweek*, April 8, 1994, pp. 18-19, Michael Elliot, "The Caning Debate"). I'm sorry the debate has only recently arisen. My Mom went to be with the Lord fifteen years ago. She wasn't altogether sure of her national origin, but I now realize she was from Singapore. We got caned regularly. Mom said that, after all, the Bible said she had to do it to us, and who was she to doubt biblical authority. This was a few years before the ever popular "How to Develop Buns of Steel" video, and it never occurred to Mom that buns were physically ornamental. She actually believed that God made buttocks to be beaten. By the time we Millers were grown we didn't have any buns left to be ornamental. Beating little cherubic bottoms was third on Mom's doctrine list: Salvation, Eternal Security, Bottom-Beating was her doctrinal order, and when we misbehaved she usually moved beating up on the list. I thought I had A.D.D. once, too, but due to the deep pain in the seat of my pants, I changed my mind. I have a fellow preacher friend who got caned a lot. He said that when his mother got real mad she also said, "Douggy, I'm gonna tear off your head and spit down the hole." "It was the canings," he said, "that made me think she might actually do it." I had six ratty sisters that led me into continual canings. The only reason that Paul could say, "thrice was I beaten with rods (2 Cor. 11:24-25)" is because he never had my mother. Folks, I have been beaten with rods so many times I don't want to talk about it. Where the heck was that *Newsweek* poll when I needed it. Of course, if I had shown Mom the poll, she would have beaten me again for back-talk. We even had to be careful what we let pass through our minds. My wife's mother once beat her up because she appeared to be thinking something bad. Well, the small violence of caning is out.

Now people get shot on Highway 183 for changing lanes without signaling. If you're really busy and you don't have time to get dressed up and go downtown to a bar to get shot, just stand out in front of your home and they'll drive by and shoot you. Sure is convenient. A little boy was stabbed in a Dallas school by another little boy. The judge said for Dallas not to overreact; little boys do that kind of thing nowadays. Twenty-three were gunned in Killeen eating the Luann special at Lubys. Two high-schoolers were shot in Dallas at a Blockbuster Video shop. Three girls were raped and stabbed in front of a sandwich shop in Irving. Just your typical, normal day in the depraved society. Three cars have been vandalized sitting in my driveway in Fort Worth this past

year. I hate to ask my friends to drive their cars over to my house, but then I hate to ask my friends to walk over. What are we going to do to stop all this? I don't know. We can't hurt the little darlings; they could have Attention Deficit Disorder, you know.

It's the nakedness of this demonic society that makes us afraid. How we need to join the Christ of the Apocalypse in rebuking this depraved generation:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either one or the other. So then because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich: I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes so that you can cover up the shame of your nakedness.”

Revelation 3:15-18

American Christianity? Is there a robust theology set in place to answer the depravity? Hardly. Robert W. Funk and his group of 74 scholars, known as the Jesus Seminar, have decided that fully 82 percent of the teachings of Christ are unauthentic (*Christianity Today*, p.30, April 25, 1994). They read a passage and vote with colored beads—red, pink, gray, or black—as to how authentic the Gospels are. If there has ever been a time for all believers to denounce as one the evil in our land, this must be that day.

Yet out of our crazy and confused day, the Christ of everyday, the Lord of the right now is calling out the redeemed. Can you hear Legion crying, “**What do you want with me, Jesus thou Son of the Most High God (Luke 8:28).**” Here is the glorious irresistible grace of the most High God. He has no need of us. We can add nothing to God's stature or glory. Yet here He is ferreting out of graveyards the naked and mentally indecent. There is some good news: Christ still commands the ugly demons to get out of the lives of all those God wants to redeem. Christ, the cultural exorcist, still cries, “Begone you demons; you are not worthy to be in the hearts of men. You are worthy only to inhabit the souls of pigs. I rebuke you, America, for being content to be pigs. Order your permissive morality into the sewers from which you took it. Bid your children honor their bodies as temples. Bid your young men lay down their guns, and preach the gospel of peace.”

Here is the tenet of evangelism: “What do you want with me?” See this poor demoniac. His question is “Who am I?” Among the tombs he roams in unholy grottoes of his mind. Screaming lights that none can see but dive at him from nowhere. Thunder, none can hear but him, roars in his ears. He is fierce, he has been chained hand-and-foot, yet in his terrible strength he has even broken chains. And what is his driving preoccupation? It is *Who am I?* or *Why am I in the*

world? or *Have I any real purpose here?* Then Jesus comes. The giant meets the Son of Man!

See them! Jesus and the demoniac. They rush together and he raises his fierce hands as though he will crush Jesus' skull. Ah, but Christ, his lover, catches his fearful, trembling soul and smiles into those wild eyes and orders out the demons. Notice that down to verse 29 the passage speaks of a single demon, but for the next four verses it speaks of “demons” in the plural. It is like the film *The Three Faces of Eve*; there seem to be multiple personalities from the Abyss all invading the life of this poor man. He is so filled with the powers of hell, he has lost all track of who he is. But Jesus rebukes the demons, the pigs fly down the hill and rush into the sea. Then come the Gerasenes to find the man sitting with Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

Demons steal human identity. Christ gives it back; it's as simple as that. We never own our own souls until we give them unto Him. The first words of our true identity are four, *I AM BORN AGAIN!* John Newton, the slaver, was utterly bewildered about his identity until the wretched night of his drunkenness in which he yielded to God's Amazing Grace, saying, in effect, *I am born again.* John Wesley lamented, *I went to America to convert the Indians but, alas, who shall convert me?* Then he yielded at Aldersgate, crying in joy, something like, *I am born again!*

Being born again always means renunciation. Sometimes we must renounce our wealth, sometimes our poverty. Sometimes being born again means that we must take off our rich robes and give ourselves naked to Jesus. Sometimes, we must lay aside our nakedness and take upon us the robe of decency. According to Zefereilli, when Francis of Assisi turned his back upon his father's wealth, he was hauled into the public square to give account of his ministry. He would no longer live in luxury while the common people starved. He looked unto Jesus and laid by his father's rich, purple robe and, standing naked in the square, having surrendered all, cried, “*I am born again!*” For Jesus' sake Francis walked away naked, but born again. But see this shaggy, naked giant? Called from a graveyard, sitting with Christ above the bay of pigs, calling for a robe, and looking into the eyes of Christ he says, as it were, “*Praise the Lord, I am born again!*” And being born again he took upon himself a glorious robe of decency. Some are saved like Legion, some like Francis.

I remember a single altar call in our church in which two people came forward to be born again. One was a hooker, one a young physician. I know Peter Wagner says that churches grow by homogenous units. Hookers go to one kind of church, and doctors to another, generally speaking, says Wagner. But, honestly folks, never having read the church growth manuals, there they were standing side by side. A doctor and a hooker. And what was really nice is that the doctor didn't know the hooker was one. And the hooker didn't know the doctor was one. They were just there because they both had business to do with God. And being

born again meant that one had to start covering up a bit, and the other had to start giving up a bit. The hooker, like Legion, needed to get a little more into decency than she had. The doctor, like Francis, needed to renounce a little of his wardrobe and high-living. One had to quit being naked and the other had to start being a little more so.

But there is special glory in seeing a madman clothed and in his right mind. Naturally, he wants to go with Jesus in Luke 8:38, but Jesus said "No. You just start giving your testimony in your village (Luke 8:39)." And so he did. So far, all of our geological excavations have not unearthed any old Aramaic revival fliers, reading, "*Hear the testimony of Legion the pigman of Gerasa!*" So I think it is safe to assume, he never went into full-time evangelism. He just got involved in a local evangelism program. But his heart of compassion probably led him back to the tombs, to get in all the rebuking time he could in driving the devils out of other people's lives. I don't think he ever got over the thrill of seeing demoniacs clothed and in their right minds, sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Conclusion:

So what does the story really say? I think it asks a question. Are we walking around in those graveyards, where the demoniacs have come to define our culture? Somehow I think if Jesus had been like us, He would have ordered a Discipleship Resource Kit, and everybody in the church would have sat around defining how nice it was to be an undemoned. But, no, He walked deliberately among the tombs and sure enough, He met a live one.

And I hear people say to me all the time, "You just can't do evangelism the old way." "OK," I say, "show me your new way." Well, we gotta get user friendly, and be really lots of fun, and when they see how open we are, why they'll just flock in. Maybe, but 95 percent of those joining the megachurches have already been led to Christ by someone else. Where? I don't know for sure, maybe out in the graveyards. Maybe by people who aren't afraid of naked madmen. And being realistic, pork therapy has its limitations. Frankly, there's just not enough pigs around to absorb all the demons anymore. I mean when you think about humanism, multiculturalism, New Age, free sex, drive-by shootings, Madonna and Dr. Ruth, folks, we're gonna need a lot of pigs to get this culture back in its right mind.

But I'm not afraid of madmen anymore. Maybe that's still the first step. I led a man to Christ in Omaha, and he came and joined the church and was baptized. He wanted me to try to lead his son to the Lord. His son was an attorney. It's not altogether impossible to lead a lawyer to the Lord, but you need a lot of lead. I talked with him a couple of times about Jesus. I thought I was getting nowhere, but then all of a sudden he showed up in church. He came on one of those Sundays that I was totally wrong. That Sunday, I had a real two-fisted sermon, just crammed with the Bible. When I saw him sitting there in a pew, how I wished that I was doing a

seeker-service. If only I had a three-act play and a song about motherhood and a brass band, maybe I would not offend a sweet-little lawyer. But alas, I was planning to preach on sin. How was I ever to build a megachurch? Talk about being inadequate! Here I was with a real live lawyer in the audience and no user-friendly sermon. So with only a poor biblical sermon, I set out violating all the laws of church growth. Alas I read the Bible . . . way too much of it! Then I quoted some more Scripture stuff on eternity. Totally irrelevant. This sermon would never be published. It was too much like Paul would have done it. It was clearly too full of earnest content. I just stood there hanging out all the red flags of Scripture: Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9. I was sure I was about to drive this lawyer straight into the arms of Bob Schuller. Realizing it was a bad day for contemporary homiletics anyway, I went off the deep end. I said right outloud that the first step to meaning was to get rid of the sin in our lives and the second was to embrace Jesus as Lord. What a failure.

I have no explanation for what happened next. The lawyer came forward in tears. Lawyer tears are precious. Most law firms require the surgical removal of their tear ducts. But he stood there crying. The deacons were afraid to approach him. Everybody's afraid of a crying lawyer. But I went down to him, totally unafraid. And we hugged. And Christ came in. Then his newly saved dad came down and we three hugged. And then the whole church started hugging.

And the demons fled into pigs and the pigs were choked in the sea. And revival came to the church. I would not advise you to do this. It's far too radical. Stick with those user-friendly megachurch manuals. Work on your drama club and your combos. It takes courage to live in the graveyards, and as I have said there are just not enough pigs to heal a culture anyway.

Still when joy is on the church and people are being born again, I don't know why, but I'm afflicted with the question that nearly every Demoniac I know is asking, "Lord, what do you want with me?" In a culture where a lot of people are already living like pigs, maybe more pigs aren't all that necessary. Maybe you don't need to add a three-act altar play. Maybe all we really need to do is play Jesus. Some Sunday when the orchestra is out sick and the drama club can't be there because they're all involved with a community theater production, you might want to try this more direct approach. It's corny and old-fashioned, but read a verse of Scripture or two, and then go directly into rebuking demons. There's always plenty of them around. Perhaps then like Legion the demoniac, secure in the arms of Jesus, we will sing Wesley's words, while the pigs stack up at the bottom of the cliff:

My chains fell off, I was set free,
I rose left all and followed thee.

A Layman Speaks to the Pastor

By Zig Ziglar

ZIG ZIGLAR — president of Zig Ziglar Corporation in Dallas; motivational speaker and trainer. Formerly sales champion. Author of nine books, including See You At the Top and Confessions of a Happy Christian, and extensive array of audio and video tapes and training tools. Married to Jean for 46 years; four children.

NOTE: As you read this message it will help if you will imagine that you are seated in the audience and I am speaking to you.

To begin, I'd like to do a little market survey. How many of you have either heard me before or else this is your first time? Now for some theological questions supplied by my friend, Dr. James Merritt. How many of you believe everything you read in the Bible? How many of you believe everything you read in the daily paper? How many of you spend more time reading what you don't believe than you spend reading what you do believe?

Now for a trick question: How many of you have ever attended a boring worship service? Remember, I told you it was a trick question. You may have attended a boring church service but you've never attended a boring worship service. How could you make the Creator of the world, Who can feed the multitudes on the loaves and the fishes, Who can still the wind, open the eyes of the blind and raise the dead, boring?

All of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments, but I'm going to take a little liberty and talk about "The Ten Suggestions" that, as a layman, I would like to make to the preachers of the world.

I heard about a fellow who was "dog drunk," and dressed in torn, dirty clothes. He bumped into his pastor, who was stunned and said to him, "I can't believe this. You're in awful shape." The fellow responded, "Well, Pastor, it's been tough on me. I just hit rock bottom! Everything is going wrong. It's terrible! What would you suggest I do?" And the pastor said, "Go home and get your Bible out, let it fall open, and wherever it falls open you put your finger on it and there'll be a Word from God and you take that as a message to you."

A couple of months later the pastor saw him again and he was beautifully dressed in a thousand-dollar suit and standing next to a \$50,000 automobile—I mean, he was in great financial shape. And the pastor said, "Congratulations, but I'm curious. Where did God put your finger when you opened the Bible?" He said, "Well, Pastor, I opened my Bible and put my finger squarely on Chapter Eleven."

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who take that kind of liberty with God's Word. They interpret it on their own so I suggest to the pastors of the world that they refer to a recent issue of the *Dallas Morning News* which listed the names of 125,000 people who have money in Austin, Texas—anywhere from fifty dollars to thousands of dollars. Many people searched that list very carefully for their name, hoping they could pick up some money they did not know existed. As a layman I'm far more interested in knowing that God has recorded my name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

My name is not recorded in Austin—I checked the list. But from a layman to a pastor I encourage you to tell me something that I already inherently believe which will help me to know exactly how to get my name recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. Fortunately, everybody believes in God. Deep down, because God reveals Himself, they know there is a God. I love the story told about Mordecai Ham.

Mordecai Ham was one of those "hell-fire and brimstone preachers," preaching Heaven sweet and Hell hot. He was preaching when Billy Graham made his commitment to Christ. Once, just before he started preaching, a gentleman said to him, "Mr. Ham, I just want you to know I'm here out of curiosity. I don't believe in Heaven, I don't believe in Hell, I don't believe in the Bible and I sure don't believe in prayer." Mordecai Ham responded, "You're a very unusual fellow."

When Mordecai Ham got up to preach he said, "Now, folks, we have an unusual man here. He doesn't believe in Heaven, doesn't believe in Hell, doesn't believe in God, doesn't believe in prayer. Now, what I want all of us to do right now is to start praying that God will kill this man before I finish preaching." The man jumped up and ran out of the church screaming, "Don't you do it! Don't you do it!"

Pastor, if there is someone in your pew who inherently believes there is a God but who doesn't know how to trust Him through commitment to Christ, do you make his choices clear? I want my pastor to tell me and every other lost person in the congregation that we have a choice. Make it crystal clear that if we make the right choice we get to go to Heaven; if we make the wrong choice, we go to Hell. Without a clear choice there is confusion and a confused mind does not make eternal decisions.

From childhood until I was 45 years old I sat in church somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 times, but until an elderly black lady who was Scripturally inaccurate, claimed to be an angel, claimed to be a faith healer, claimed to be a prophetess—was none of those things but who loved me and who loved the Lord—took the time and spent the weekend with us and shared with me one-on-one what Christ had done for me, I was lost and doomed to an eternal Hell. She walked in our home talking about Christ, she walked out of our home talking about Christ, all the time she was there she was talking about Christ and it changed every facet of my life.

Again, Pastor, make absolutely certain that you help me believe what I instinctively already believe. Brown Trucking

Company from Atlanta, with over a hundred outlets around the country, when it was permissible to do so, gave a lie detector test to every employee they hired. One of the questions they always asked was, "Do you believe there is a God?" And in 100 percent of the cases, involving thousands of people, when the person answered "no," the lie detector needle went off the chart.

As a layman, I have been to funerals of believers and I've been to funerals of those who do not believe. I can tell you there's a dramatic difference. The despair at the funeral of the lost one who has died is pronounced. Many times the preacher will do everything he can and still maintain his integrity to make the family feel good. But the reality is that the one who is lying in the casket, if he did not trust Christ, we know he will not spend his eternity with Christ—and so do his loved ones. That's why I encourage you to preach out of the Bible with conviction.

As an aside, let me explain that I speak and write at the 7th grade, 9th month level. I keep it at that level because a few years ago I discovered that if I keep it there, even the college professors will be able to follow right along with me and understand what I'm saying. But my good friend, Dr. Steve Franklin, college professor from Emory University in Atlanta, said, "Zig, the great truths in life are the simple truths."

Think about it. You don't need three syllables or four moving parts for something to be profound. There are only three pure colors, but look at what Michelangelo did with them. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, 262 words, delivered right after the Battle of Gettysburg, contains two hundred and sixty-two words and two hundred and two of them are one syllable, simple and direct. John 3:16—26 words, 21 of them are one syllable, and yet upon those words rests my eternal soul. There are only ten numerical digits, but look what Einstein did with those ten digits. There are only seven musical notes, but look at what Chopin, Beethoven and Mozart did with those seven notes. Look at what Elvis did with two! It doesn't have to be complicated to be significant. What could be more beautiful, simple or profound than "God is love," or "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so"?

In my own simple (not simplistic) way, I believe that the God Who created the universe can figure out a way to get a Bible printed which has absolutely no errors in it. You see, Pastor, I'm a theological baby and if you tell me that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not inspired by God, then I'm going to wonder about John 3:16. Keep it simple so that I don't get confused.

But don't sell me short, either, because Psalms 19:7 says that "the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Consider my mother. She finished the fifth grade and was left a widow in the heart of the Depression with six of us too young to work. I can still see her in that old home over in Yazoo City, Mississippi, on that screened-in back porch where she would sit and churn the milk to make the

butter and the buttermilk. She had two favorite hymns. On Wednesday it was "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that takes me from a world of care." On Sunday it was "The Old Rugged Cross," which she has now exchanged for a crown. This lady, with her fifth-grade education, had an incredible amount of wisdom and an unbelievable love for the Lord. She was a simple person and yet God gave her a wisdom and an understanding that was absolutely amazing to me.

Something else, Pastor. I want you as a preacher to tell me what God says I must not do. I'm a babe in Christ and I know I can't trust my feelings, so give me the guidelines I need to get through the minefields of life. Man is telling me that I can do all kinds of things, but man's permissibles very frequently eliminate God's possibles. Since God's possibles give me more than man's permissibles, I need you to firmly and lovingly tell me what God does and does not want me to do.

Number three, tell me again and again and again—I need to hear some things over and over tell me the old, old story, over and over, how God sent His Son from Glory to die on the cross for a sinner like me. I need to hear that story. Modern advertisers know that repetition does have a dramatic impact. Let me see if I can get you to participate with me to demonstrate what I'm talking about. I'm going to start the phrase and you finish it for me, please: Pepsi Cola hits the . . . twelve-ounce bottle, that's a . . . Drink Coca-Cola, the pause that . . . I'd walk a mile for a . . . Duz does . . . It has been over 45 years since the Camel or Duz ads were run. It has been over 30 years since the Coke and Pepsi ads were on, but we remember them because over and over again the airways bombarded us with those messages. Tell me over and over and over that God really does love me, that He is in control and that all things work together for good for those who love Him.

Remember, Pastor, I watch what you do. You are my role model. I know you are not perfect because you are not God, but I believe God called you to lead me in my understanding of God. You will break my heart, Pastor, and affect my faith if you preach one thing and practice another. I might not believe everything you say but I'm going to believe everything that you do. My mother repeatedly said to me—particularly when our children were young—"Son, your children pay more attention to what you do than what you say."

Not only is God watching you, but we lay people are watching you as well. We especially watch your relationship with your family, which is by far your most important witness. The way you treat them, the things you say about them, the amount of time you spend with them—all are of interest and concern to us. Yes, we want and need some of your time, Pastor, but it will be hard for us to understand how you can genuinely love us if you don't first love the most important people in your life. For wives and children, love is spelled T-I-M-E. We're delighted you have a

servant's heart and want to serve us, but it's more than just a saying that "love begins at home."

Perhaps more than anything else, Pastor, we're going to watch for consistency in your life. There have been some real tragedies in the ministry when pastors lost sight of their service to our Lord and responsibility to themselves, their families and their congregations. There are many notable examples of godly men who have fallen because they did not use wisdom and protect themselves against temptation. I really encourage you, Pastor, to appoint some godly man who will hold you accountable with whom you can talk and share your innermost thoughts, feelings and needs. This will protect you, Pastor, and enrich your ministry in a thousand ways. I know this is a heavy load, but when you answered God's call, you knew that it was not going to be easy. Ultimately, Pastor, this will lighten your burden and enable you to be God's man all the time. It will eliminate hypocrisy, which is what the secular world criticizes us most about.

Number five, don't apologize for your faith and don't apologize for God. Incredibly enough, I have seen some pastors who seemed to be embarrassed about the fact that they were ministers of the Gospel. The highest calling in the world is to be a minister preaching God's Word. I don't want to be presumptuous, Pastor, but God does tell us that if we don't recognize Him here, He's not going to know us there. Obviously, He is talking about laymen *and* pastors.

Unfortunately, the media has conditioned us to believe that we must never talk about religion (except in church) and we must never talk about politics. I challenge you or anybody else to name two subjects any more important in our personal, family, and business life than religion and politics. We need to be talking about our faith, we need to be bold about our faith, we need to let people know what is important in life.

Tell us what God says. There are many sincere people today who, because of the media, and even more tragically, government officials, talk about premarital and extramarital sex as if it were the normal, expected conduct and that "everybody is doing it." You need to tell us over and over that God has a better plan that is infinitely more beautiful and enduring, and ultimately brings more happiness, joy and peace of mind.

Let me share a personal story about what can happen when we build a relationship on God's plan. I thought I loved the Redhead. Those of you who know me know that when I refer to my wife, at her request, I always call her "The Redhead." When I'm talking to her, it's "Sugar Baby." And her name is Jean. Last November we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. We've only been married 47 years—but we had heard so much about the 50th that for the last twenty years we've been celebrating the 50th and we have found it to be a very exciting experience! As I said, I thought I loved that Redhead when we got married. Five years later I thought I loved her; ten years later I thought I loved her; twenty years later I thought I loved her. But until I learned to

love her through Jesus Christ, I had no idea what love is all about.

This was brought clearly into focus several years ago on a beautiful Sunday morning in Jerusalem. Maybe it was because I'd been on the Sea of Galilee where so much of our Lord's ministry had taken place, maybe it was because I had been privileged to read the Sermon on the Mount where we believe our Lord had actually preached that sermon. Perhaps it was because I had stepped into the Lord's tomb or because I'd been privileged to serve the Lord's Supper in the Garden of Gethsemane. Pastor Ben Glosson from Hazelhurst, Georgia, was preaching his heart out about the beauty and the love of God and what He did for us on Calvary. In the midst of the sermon, he started singing in a beautiful, clear voice "How Great Thou Art." As he sang, tears started streaming down my cheeks and God, in an almost audible voice, spoke to me that morning (normally God speaks to me through His Bible) and answered a question that had been on my mind for a number of years.

You see, I had been saying something that bothered me because it didn't make any sense, but I said it because it was true. I'd been telling people that my wife was more beautiful to me today than she was on our wedding day. After more than 40 years of marriage, somehow it doesn't—humanly speaking—make sense that she could be more beautiful than she was as an 18-year-old bride, and yet it was true. Then God explained it all: "Let me tell you why you see your wife as being more beautiful today than she was on your wedding day. I'm letting you look at her through My eyes, and I see perfection." Had I never known Jesus, I would have missed that. Tell me, Pastor, tell me what it means to know Jesus. Tell me what it means in my everyday life. Teach me how to draw closer and closer to Him so I can have an intimate and personal relationship with Him so that my life might be a richer one.

Number six, give me something I can use this week in my life. Last week was tough and I need a word of encouragement. Remind me that there is a God in Heaven Who cares, that His laws and His plans are perfect, that they work and that if I love and trust Him those plans are for my good.

Number seven, remind me that in Christ I am a winner. Sometimes we forget that fact when we read about the crime, violence, poverty and immorality in our land. I need to hear that good news this week, Pastor, because I just lost my job, my house payment is due, and my baby is sick. Tell me, Pastor, that I am a winner. Remind me that I am a winner in Christ not because of what I can do, but because of what He has done. Tell me again and again that there's no discouragement after the resurrection.

Number eight, Pastor, keep telling me over and over how much God loves me. I know He does because He sent His only-begotten Son to die for my sins. My memory is not bad, it's just that I need that reassurance that despite everything that happens "out there," He is intimately involved in my

life, so much so that He literally watched every bone as it was being formed in my mother's womb. He not only counted the hairs on my head, He has numbered those hairs. He loves me so much that had I been the only person on earth, He would have sent His Son to die on Calvary so that I could live forever. Oh, you've told me that, Pastor, dozens of times; tell me one more time. Don't ever let me leave your church, or God's church, without reminding me that there is a God in Heaven Who is concerned about me.

Number nine, tell me, Pastor, when I fail and sin without understanding all the consequences. Many of us laymen, especially the younger ones who have been conditioned by the media to believe that since "everybody's doing it," living together before marriage, gambling via the lottery, watching pornographic movies or television, etc., are really not "that bad." I need to know about sin, Pastor, because as Jerry Vines says, sin takes me further than I want to go, charges me more than I want to pay, and keeps me longer than I want to stay. Help me also to clearly understand, Pastor, that if I do fall into the cesspool of sin that with God's help I can come out of that sin and that God loves me despite my failures.

One of the things that is exciting to me is the fact that as Christ walked on this earth, He was subjected to the same temptations that you and I are subjected to. And yet it says He lived a sinless life. He is the One that we need to have as our role-model always. Keep telling me that when I fail God loves me anyhow, that He forgives me of those sins. You see, Pastor, when I have done something that is wrong I feel bad about it, I really do, but tell me that failure is an event, it's not a person. Keep telling me God loves me and will forgive me. You see, Pastor, when I deserve it the least is when I need it the most.

I conclude with a love story. I love the game of golf. Many people play the game better, but nobody loves the game any more. I don't get to play very often so when I do play I like to tee that sucker up so I have a clear shot at it. When I hit it I give it everything I've got—boooooooooom! Then if I can find it, I hit it again! For many years I've been traveling regularly, so I wasn't about to come home and head for the golf course, but I love to play golf so I came up with a brilliant idea if I do say so myself. I bought my wife—and my son—a set of golf clubs. And everybody was excited about it except my wife and my son. But they went along with me for a couple of games, then the redhead said, "Honey, I just don't like to play golf. It's too hot or it's too cold, too wet or too windy or too something, so I'm going to drop out, but you and Tom keep playing, I know you enjoy it and you need to be with him." There went golf buddy number one.

At the end of the summer my boy said, "Dad, I don't know how to tell you this, because I know how good you like to play golf, I know how good you like to be with me, but golf just is not my game. I'll wrestle with you, throw the football with you, go fishing with you, or play catch with

you, but Dad, golf is just not my game. Count me out." There went golf buddy number two.

The next two years I didn't get to play much golf and then one night I was back in town and we had gone out to dinner. After dinner we passed a driving range and my son, Tom, said, "Dad, let's stop and hit a few." Since my boy is a smooth talker we stopped to hit a few. After a few minutes he said, "Dad, let me borrow one of your woods." I handed him the four wood, he choked up on it and hit that sucker about 40 yards further than he'd ever hit a golf ball. When he turned around that smile on his face clearly said, "Ziglar, you've got yourself a golfin' buddy now." Second most beautiful smile I've ever seen on that boy's face.

The most beautiful one came two days later. We were out at the club playing and were on a par four. Tom took that four wood and again he let the string out, he pole axed that sucker down the middle and it hit the ground running like a scared rabbit and ended up right in the middle of the fairway—perfect position. For the second shot he took his five iron and just like you've seen them do on television, he kept his head down, stroked it beautifully and it landed on the green as soft as a butterfly with sore feet about 40 feet from the cup. He's hunting his bird.

If you're not a golfer, that means that if he sinks the putt on this hole, he's one under par for the hole. If you don't know what that means, it means he done good! I showed Tom how to line and stroke the putt. When he stroked that putt, just like it had eyes it went straight to the bottom of the cup. When that ball hit the bottom of the cup, my son jumped straight up in the air about seven feet—and still beat me to the ground by three seconds! Talk about excitement, I grabbed my boy and hugged him, we did a victory dance for a couple of minutes and then I realized I had a problem. I was also on the green about ten feet from the cup, so I was hunting my bird. I knew if I missed my putt Tom would figure I'd missed it on purpose so he could win. That would have given him a cheap victory which is quite a loss. So I determined that I was going to do the very best I could so that if I did miss it then I could honestly say, "Son, congratulations. You've won it fair and square."

Now, I don't know what most preachers think about this, but I believe I'm supposed to give my best effort and my best effort always includes a little providential help. I believe that's o.k., even on a golf course, maybe especially on a golf course! I lined that putt and stroked it as well as I've ever stroked a putt in my life, and just like it had eyes, it went straight to the bottom of that cup. Before I reached down to pick it up I looked at my son and I said, "Now tell me the truth, Son. Were you pulling for Dad?"

I think you know what it would have meant had I missed. He was eleven years old. He had never beaten his dad a hole of golf. It would have meant a lot to him had I missed that putt—he would have won. Yet, without any hesitation, quietly but very firmly he looked me right in the eye and he said, "Dad, I always pull for you."

That's love. That's pure love. That's what we need more of in Dallas, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; Spokane, Washington; and L.A., California. That's what we need in every home, in every school, in every church, in every community in this land of ours. We need to understand that people really don't care how much we know—until they know how much we care about them. The beautiful thing about knowing Jesus Christ personally is that I know that every day of my life, as long as I'm in His will, Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe, is pulling for me. Psalms 25:14 tells me this: "I am confident of this: God is for me."

One of the many reasons I love my pastor, Jack Graham, is he preaches God's Word and God's love every Sunday. Pastor, your staff and your lay people need to hear that old, old story—over and over again until they know to the depth of their being that if Christ is for us, regardless of who is against us, we are already victors in Him. What a marvelous Savior we have! Tell us about Him, Pastor, every Sunday morning. And Pastor, I don't want to make your load any heavier, but our America is in big trouble. Jesus Christ is the only solution. When you make it clear that Christ is the solution to America's problems, then—and only then—will those problems be solved. What an opportunity you have! Thank you and God bless you.

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A Pattern for Prosperity

Acts 4

By Larry W. Wynn

Larry W. Wynn is senior pastor of Hebron Baptist Church, Dacula, Georgia. He has served as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention. His church currently supports five missions and was ranked first in total number of baptisms in Georgia in 1988-89 and 1989-90. He and his wife, Ethel, have three children.

"From the start, the movement was doomed to fail. For one thing, it began with just 120 men. Remarkably few, when you consider that their homeland had a population of four million. Besides that, most of the men were illiterate and poor. Blue-collar workers they were; far too ignorant to stage an uprising that could make a difference. Few, if any, had traveled beyond their own country. They were inexperienced and uncultured. Their nation was oppressed. Their people were weary. Their government was corrupt. Their religion was shallow. The strategy of the movement was disastrous. No headquarters was ever established. No professional research was ever done. On top of all of this, the movement was impractical. It was far too extreme and absurd. It demanded too much too soon. It lacked any tact. It was too

impatient with traditions. It called for a reversal of social classes. It gave too much leverage to women and minority groups. The movement was doomed to failure. But it didn't fail. It succeeded. Not only did it succeed, it far surpassed any movement in our world's history. Within 30 years the message of Jesus Christ had entered every port, city, and courtyard of the world. It was infectious. It was a moving organism. People actually died to see it continue. It should have failed, but it succeeded." (*On the Anvil*, Max Lucado.)

The early church was prosperous. Not in the way we think so often of prosperity, but in the true sense of the word. The word defined means to succeed, thrive, grow, in a vigorous way. (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Third College Edition, 1989.) No one can dispute the fact the church experienced vigorous growth.

There is much discussion today about church growth. "The church growth movement" is a phrase that has spawned discussion both pro and con. Much has been written and preached on the subject. Models are analyzed, praised, and criticized. Using Webster's definition I believe, without a doubt, it is God's desire the church prosper.

Why was the early church so successful in carrying out its mission? Is that same success possible today? I believe there are certain foundational principles that led to the early church's growth and success. No matter the model one follows today these same principles work. They are as follows.

The Church must focus on truth rather than tradition. Acts 4:12 defines the message of the New Testament Church. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The message of the New Testament Church was Jesus Christ, pure and simple. That is the message of the church today. It remains unchanged throughout the centuries. A church that is to be successful must proclaim Jesus Christ and His Salvation. The church is called upon to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of people, but, primarily, the mission of the church is to point people to the Cross of Christ. That is the truth of the Gospel. There is only one way to God. If one is to know God He must come through Christ. Eternal life is found in Christ and Christ alone. For the church to be successful there is no compromise to the message! Jesus is, indeed, the Only Way.

At the same time we must be careful not to confuse the *message* with *methods*. Our message is sacred, but our methods are not. The religious people of Jesus day had "deified" methodology and tradition. Jesus, in addressing the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1-3, asked the question, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" Churches need to be reminded as we battle for the Book we don't need to become militant about methods. Tradition is killing many of our churches in America today. The biggest battles between congregations and pastors are not over anything of substance, but trivial traditions—things like the locations of classrooms, the order

of service, the type songs to be sung, the time for revival, etc. The list could go on and on.

I pastor a very old church. Hebron was established in 1842. By the time I became pastor in 1978 the church had established many traditions. For instance, the deacons had determined years before they would acquire the revival preachers. The pastor had nothing to do with that. The offering was to be taken after the third song and the fourth verse. One of my many battles that almost cost me my job was moving the offering to the end of the service. You would have thought I denied the resurrection when I did that. We have become so structured we have structured Christ right out of the church.

"Dwight L. Moody once brought a pew full of boys and girls from the street to a church he anticipated joining. The presence of Moody's guests so disturbed the aristocratic church that when he presented himself for membership, the church board suggested Moody take a month to pray about his desire to join their church. A month later Moody was asked by the board, Did you follow our suggestions? Moody affirmed he had. And what did the Lord say? Mr. Moody then said, He told me not to feel bad about it because He has been trying to get into this church Himself for the last 25 years." Often churches don't grow, because traditions are more important than the truth.

The church must view challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. The early church faced many challenges that could, humanly speaking, be considered almost insurmountable obstacles to prosperity. We must remember the early church had no property, few possessions, a lack of popularity with the religious establishment, and the threat of persecution to offer those who joined the movement. Yet, the early church experienced phenomenal growth. Why? They focused on what they did have rather than what they lacked.

Most churches, today, are limited because of focus. We dwell on what we don't have to the point of forgetting what we have available to us. Most pastors are limited by a church growth wish list. The desire for a better location, better people, better facilities, and bigger budgets top the "Church growth wish list" for most. Certainly those things are helpful, and those who have them are without excuse, but we must not forget the early church didn't have these amenities either. But that didn't stop them.

Acts 4 demonstrates what the early church did have available. Acts 4:24 reveals they had *the power of prayer* at their disposal. Every problem in the New Testament church was handled by a prayer meeting. The early Christians demonstrated a deep dependency on God. How that has changed today. Our dependency is on programs, human power, and procedures. Rather than handling our problems in prayer meeting we attempt to handle them in business meeting. We try to vote change and growth and evangelism into existence rather than praying these things into being. Look at the difference. The early church was characterized

by power; the modern church by paralysis. The early church was bold; the modern church is bound by bureaucracy. Prayer must be the foundation of church growth. As E.M. Bounds said, "When you have programs you get what programs can do. When you have methods you get what methods can do. But, when you pray, you get what God can do." We desperately need what God can do.

The early church was also characterized by *perseverance*. The word "quit" was absent from the vocabulary of the New Testament church. We need an old-fashion dose of perseverance in today's church. The attitude of today's society is "If at first you don't succeed, quit!" That attitude has permeated the church. Tragically, it has become the attitude of most pastors. At the first sign of difficulty or opposition many dig out the old resume and pass it around. Churches never grow without struggles, and they do not grow without commitment to long-term ministry. Tenure of the pastor is key to a successful ministry. A study was done recently of how the length of a pastor's tenure affects a church's potential for growth. He surveyed over 500 churches including growing, plateaued, and declining congregations. The two factors are very clearly linked. In almost three out of four of the growing churches, the pastor had been there four years or longer. More than 66 percent of the declining churches had had their current pastor less than four years. Since the typical pastorate lasts only 3.7 years, this finding suggests that brief pastoral tenure may be a significant part of why 82 percent of churches are stagnating or losing ground. More churches would prosper if more of God's men would persevere.

The church that prospers will focus was on people rather than programs. Acts 4:31 tells us after they had prayed these believers left the prayer meeting and boldly proclaimed Christ to a lost world. The early church didn't wait for the unsaved to come to them. They reached out in power to the unsaved. The results were staggering. By Acts 6 people were no longer being added to the church; the church was multiplying. Oh, to see that happen today.

The early church was *focused on people*. We make the mistake of focusing on programs. We develop programs and encourage people to come. The problem is many of our programs are out-dated and non-effective. But, in a Baptist church it is heretical to kill a program. It's OK that people die without Christ, but let the program live on! Most churches would be better off to wipe out about 90 percent of what they do and start over. A new start with a focus on the needs of people in the community could do wonders for the prosperity of the local church.

We must be willing to get out among unsaved people. Pastors, that is true for us, also. How many lost people do we really know? The longer we are saved the fewer the number of unsaved people who are included in our circle of influence. We spend most of our time with believers. I believe every pastor should develop a plan where he is consistently among unsaved, unchurched people. It may be

through a hobby, a ministry, or a planned system of evangelism. The method isn't nearly as important as the motivation to do it. For me it has been a chaplaincy program with local law enforcement agencies. I am involved in death notifications, official departmental functions, and ridealongs with officers. Not just saved officers either. The church has seen scores of public safety folks saved during the last years as a result of this influence. The most memorable is the salvation of a young police officer who was killed two months later in the line of duty. Through his testimony and funeral service several officers have been saved.

Our people must also be taught to share Christ where they are. There are many who will never come to the church until, first, the church goes to them. As important as programs are, personal contact is more important. Just a few days ago I had opportunity to share with a young father who is of a Moslem background. His family is a part of the Shiite sect. He is very close to accepting Christ as his personal Savior. The witness began, not with me, but with one of the men of the church who was bold enough to tell him about Jesus. Programs alone would have never reached this individual. Only a caring witness could impact him.

The early church was also *friendly and receptive* to those who came. Look at the story of the paralyzed man in Acts 4. How many "church" people had passed him by before Peter and John came along? Each week many would enter the synagogue to worship leaving this man on the outside. Exclusiveness prohibited this man from being included. How sensitive are we to those around us? In practice are we often as negligent in welcoming people as the religious crowd was in this situation? No matter how great the sermon or how relevant the programs, if newcomers don't sense an atmosphere of welcome they probably will not return.

How can we develop friendliness in our congregations?

Rick Warren, founding pastor of the 4,000-member Saddleback Community Church in Mission Viejo, California, offers practical tips for making a good impression. Parking is essential. Reserve the best spots for visitors. Let me hasten to say that is much more important than saving the best for the pastor and staff! Greeters help to relieve anxiety. We have placed greeters in our parking lots to welcome visitors as soon as they park their cars. We offer these visitors coffee or soft drinks. One adult man was saved in our church, because our greeters met him at his car and assisted him in finding a seat in the auditorium. By his own testimony, he said he was so intimidated by the size he would have left if not for that personal greeting. I'm glad he didn't leave. That day he gave his life to Christ. Later he became a greeter himself! Information areas with maps of the buildings and directional signs help people to locate childcare areas, restrooms, classrooms, and the auditorium. Generally, a friendly pastor makes for a friendly church. In one survey of unchurched people, 30 percent identified the pastor as the one single factor that would influence them to join a specific church. As pastors we need to remember names, greet people warmly, send informal letters, and lighten up if we desire people to feel at home in our churches. I just can't picture Peter and John as harsh, aloof, and unfriendly to those with whom they were sharing Christ.

God has established His church for the purpose of communicating the Gospel. Everything we do must be based on the simple Bible principle, God loves people, gave His life for people, and desires for people to be saved. Our structure, programs, attitude, and goals must be Christ-centered and people-oriented. To do less is to miss the mark!

The church can prosper in today's society. In fact every church can be wealthy—wealthy with reborn, restored, and reoriented people. Truly the "fields are white unto harvest." It's time for the church to gather the harvest.

Pastors' Conference

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Heart for the World

Acts 4:19

By Jay Strack

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The magic of Orlando is dizzying in its choices. Orlando has become the Baskin-Robbins of entertainment—thirty-eight flavors, thirty-eight choices. You can hear folks talking in the hall: What are we going to do first? Where are we going to go first? I would like to suggest to you another choice and another question.

Is it better to obey God or man? I pray that we might recapture the spirit that captured Peter and John as they were dragged off to jail by the Sanhedrin. What motivated these men to act with the courage and faith that we see in this text? I believe they were convinced of the truth that there is only one name given among men whereby we must be saved—the name of Jesus!

Not everyone believes that. The theological liberal does not believe it, as he questions the veracity of the virginal conception and literal resurrection. The universalist does not believe it, arguing that there are many names by which one may be saved. And while orthodoxy has always held to the truth that there is no other name, sometimes it has degenerated to the point that the “saving” becomes less than vital. Liberalism withers the heart of a denomination; universalism chokes out the life of a denomination; and dead orthodoxy surgically removes the tear ducts from those who name the name of Christ.

There are even many among those who claim some nominal form of Christian faith whose profession is suspect. We live in a day and age when people who think they've heard the gospel don't really understand it.

Art Linkletter came to know Christ as Savior as an adult who was already a successful television

personality. A few months after he was saved, as Easter and Good Friday were approaching, his producers, worried that the enthusiastic convert would attempt to do some kind of preaching, warned him, “Don't say anything on live TV about Easter.” Mr. Linkletter, however, was quite sneaky. On Good Friday, during the segment of the show called, “Kids say the darndest things,” he asked the little children what Easter meant to them. One little girl said it meant that she would get a new dress. Another chimed in, “We get to eat candy all day.” Yet another bubbled over about the Easter Bunny.

One little boy, however, commented that Good Friday was the day that Jesus died on the cross. Mr. Linkletter asked, “You mean He died for little children?”

“Yes,” the boy answered, “but He died for you old people, too.”

“What happened after that?” the television host asked.

“Well, after three days He was truly tired of being in that hole so he kicked off the rock and climbed out of that hole.”

“Son, you are right. That is exactly what Jesus did.”

“And,” the youngster continued, “if He sees His shadow, He goes back in for forty days and nights.”

Some people think they have it right, but still get it wrong. Unfortunately, it is not merely youngsters who are confused about the truth of the gospel, but many adults as well. How many adults in churches, I wonder, are confused about the truth of the gospel? How many have the mistaken impression that salvation is a “Me Thing”? Somehow we have to disabuse ourselves of the notion that salvation was accomplished primarily to give me peace of mind and a sense of well-being. Salvation was given to you and to me so that we could in turn offer salvation to others. 1 Corinthians 13 teaches that true love is not selfish, but many of our congregations seem to have forgotten the truth that we are called to be servants to one another.

Our generation has become enamoured with the spectacular. If someone this week were here in a wheelchair, burdened with an incurable condition, and found healing, we would be ecstatic. It would be the talk of the convention. But if the eight-year-old daughter of a pastor tugged on her father's arm and asked, “Daddy, what do I do to be saved?” we would say, “Isn't that

nice!" We need a burden for the main thing, and we need to rekindle a passion to see folks saved.

W.H. Auden had a humorous way of putting it: "We are placed here on this earth to be a blessing to others. What the others are here for, I do not know." Well, I do know: they are here to, in turn, pass the blessing on to yet others, and they to still more folks.

There is little question that Western Christianity has become increasingly focused inwardly—on itself. We all want to know what Jesus can do for us. We even appeal to lost people, saying, "Jesus will help you prosper." "Jesus will make you happy." Many seem to have the impression that Christians fly first class and others fly coach in eternity. Christians will live in the mansions, others in the ghettos. We have forgotten the consequences of a lost soul. You will never understand the meaning of the cross until you picture Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives, pointing to the burning garbage pit of Hinnom, tears streaming down His face, explaining, "This is why I must go to the Cross, be forsaken and despised." When one stood in the area of Herod's Temple, he could see the smoke of Hinnom. Others found it more convenient to place themselves with a view that saw the blue skies rather than the smoke. I'm afraid that for many, stained glasses have blocked out the view.

Make no mistake—I know Jesus is my Deliverer, for it was in this city that my father walked off and left us, and it was in this state that I went through the many broken homes of my past. It was here in this state that I suffered physical abuse, and felt my hopes and dreams being shattered before my eyes. I know Jesus is the One who has lifted the heavy burden from my back. I also know that He has brought emotional healing to my troubled heart. More than that, though, He forgave me of my sins and took me out of the realm of darkness and placed me into the kingdom of His dear Son. And after He delivered me He placed on me another burden—the burden for other people who needed to hear the Great News of Redeeming Love. He gave me a burden for a world dying and lost without Jesus.

God has given to His church the responsibility for the world. As Adam was given stewardship over the world of nature, believers have been given responsibility for the world of redemption. We are responsible to see to it that the world hears the gospel. If you are a genuine believer, and not in a backslidden condition, then you surely feel something of this burden for a world without Christ. If the statisticians are correct, there are nearly four billion people in this world who profess some other faith than that of Christ, or who profess no faith at all.

As the year 1994 dawned there were one hundred sixty-nine flags flying over the nations of this world, fifteen of which were unknown only two years before. Five billion six hundred fifty million people are alive on this island earth, most of them living in spiritual darkness. If we froze the population at present levels, it would take us forty years to catch up.

This darkness is very obvious to anyone who looks closely at the other great world religions. Please allow me a moment to give you a thumbnail sketch of some of the most prominent ones.

Animism

Many primitive peoples, in the darkness of their rejection of the truth made evident in nature, turned to the worship of nature itself. They saw spirits in the world of nature, spirits which they believed inhabited the stones, the trees and other objects in the world about them. They called the force that stood behind each object *Mana*. This *Mana* could act either for the benefit or the harm of mankind, but the only way to achieve a sense of control was to control the *Mana* through magic. The primitive man feared his ancestors, and believed that they were alive still, though in other bodies. Appeasement was made through sacrifice, sometimes human sacrifice. Animism is still practiced today, especially in places in South America and the Caribbean. There, even today, one can find, here a stone, there a tree smeared with the blood of a sacrifice made to appeal to the *Mana* or spirit of the object.

Hinduism

A bit higher up the ladder of development lies Hinduism. Centered in India, this is a great cultural religion. Its origins lie in the dim unremembered past of the second millennium B.C., but it was codified in the years 800-500 B.C. in the Upanishads. The Hindu believes that *Atman* (humanity) should not be seen as individual. In fact, the major problem humanity has lies in its failure to see the unity of self with all reality. *Brahman* (the One, or "God") is either all-cosmic or acosmic in Hinduism. But whether the particular Hindu theologian speaks of God in personal terms or impersonal, the result is the same: God is the force of life that is moving everything toward absorption of personality into "One-ness." The one thing that prevents this from happening is *Maya*, or "illusion." We live under the illusion that the world of perception is the real world, when in fact it is not real at all. The person who lives under this delusion is forced to wrestle with the difficulties of life, and so accumulates *Karma*, with the

result that he or she is continually reincarnated until liberation (*Moksha*) takes place. This only happens when one becomes adept at the three *yogas* (disciplines). Until the British outlawed the practice a century ago, one of the means to Moksha was infant sacrifice. It was common to see Hindu women by the dozens standing on the banks of the Ganges, plucking their infants screaming from their breasts, and casting them into the murky depths of the sacred river.

Buddhism

Buddhism has over three hundred million adherents in the world today. While it is strongest in Eastern and Southeastern Asia, it is very mission-minded. In Sri Lanka, funds are publicly solicited for the spread of Buddhism among "the heathen of Europe." Siddhartha Gautama was born in 563 B.C. in a village in southern Nepal. His parents married him to the most beautiful girl in the village, and surrounded him with luxuries in an attempt to forestall the religious leanings he had demonstrated from childhood. At the age of twenty-eight, he experienced a religious crisis, brought on by the "four signs" of man's lot in the world. He saw for the first time in his life a sick person, a frail old man, a corpse, and a recluse. He thus realized that suffering, disease, death, decay and separation are inherent in everyday life.

Gautama despaired of finding a solution to the problem that confronted him, until one day there came to him an illumination, an "enlightenment" as to the real cause for suffering in the world. The three principles he learned are that nothing is permanent, including human personality; sorrow is implicit in all individuality; there is no such thing as the human personality or soul. He also learned that suffering is inevitable, that the origin of suffering is desire, that suffering will only be extinguished through the destruction of desire, and that desire is only extinguished through right speech and action, meditation, and contemplation. When this has been thoroughly accomplished, *Nirvana* will be reached. Nirvana is not heaven. In fact, desire for continued existence is the unforgivable sin in Buddhism. Rather, it is the extinction of existence as the individual is merged into the whole of Oneness. In Zen Buddhism, desire is driven out by beatings inflicted by the priests in the supplicants.

Islam

The most "evangelistic" of all the great non-Christian world religions today is Islam. The word "Islam" means "to surrender," and the Muslim sees himself as one who

is surrendered to the will of God. Muhammad lived in Arabia from A.D. 570-632. He received a message he interpreted as a word from Allah, and using that message, he united the warring factions in his homeland in the last decade of his life. He bequeathed to them a monotheistic faith to replace their tribal religion, organized a powerful society and state, and launched a religious and political movement which would eventually become a religious and cultural empire. In a single century Islam spread from its humble beginnings in Arabia, across North Africa and into southeastern Europe, scattering Christianity, Judaism, and scores of local faiths in its wake. Islam believes in one God, Allah, who predestines to salvation only those who are radically obedient to him. In order to be saved the Muslim must repeat the creed, pray toward Mecca five times a day, give alms, fast during the month of Ramadan, and make a pilgrimage at least one in life, preferably to Mecca. Part of the feast of Ramadan includes a ritual in which men will crowd the streets by the thousands, and beat themselves with sticks until the pavestones run red with their blood. It is part of the cleansing they must endure for the purity of their faith.

These are the great faiths with which we have to contend. Add to these a renascent spiritism (the New Age movement), the other religions of the East, and the militant atheism which has characterized Marxist politics and much modern philosophy, and it becomes clear that we have a monumental task before us. And it is a task that is knocking on our front door, even as we gather in this great convention. According to Dr. John Sullivan, executive director for the state of Florida, thirteen percent of the state of Florida speaks a language other than English and knows very little of our tongue. In Miami alone there are 123 language groups, and the Florida Baptist Convention ministers in twenty-three languages other than English. Many of these people have brought with them not only a foreign tongue, but pagan gods, or no god at all. We have a great task.

A friend of mine owns a service station. On one occasion, his young son asked if he could go to work with his daddy. The father consented, and told the boy to bring his bicycle so that he would have something to do. In the afternoon, there was a brief but violent rainstorm that forced the youth to take shelter inside for awhile, but when it was over he returned to the parking lot to play. In a few moments the boy came running in, tears streaming down his face. "What's wrong?" the father asked. "I went out to look at the rainbow," the child responded, "but I didn't see one in the sky. Then I looked down at the wet parking lot, and I saw dead

rainbows lying all over the ground.”

I am afraid that is a parable of reality for many people in our world today. They once had rainbows in the sky—dreams, aspirations, visions of the future. But now they have only dead rainbows lying on the ground.

We have to rekindle our burden to scatter the gospel across the face of the earth. I know Southern Baptists have a heritage of evangelism and missions. But I wonder sometimes just how passionate we are about spreading the gospel. How much of our church budget is given to evangelism? How much to missions? Some churches spent less on outreach and missions last year than they did on a new van to take their people to see the leaves change. Now, don't get me wrong—I love Gatlinburg. But we need to get our priorities right. Some of us are more concerned about a Bible trip to the Bahamas than we are about a mission trip or a trip to help build a new church. I take seriously the injunction in Revelation not to add to the Scripture, but I believe Jesus Himself might endorse the statement, “By their checkbook shall ye know them.” Make no mistake: by our character, by our communication, and by our checkbook, we demonstrate our love for Jesus.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need a burden for the world. We need a burden that is intense, one that motivates us to take the gospel to the world. The world needs it, and has no other hope without it. Ladies and gentlemen, please get out a pen and write down two dates. In the Methodist denomination, every person is taught the date of May 24, 1738. That is when John Wesley had his heart-warming experience at Aldersgate. In a crusade several weeks ago, a Methodist preacher told me he had spent that day, May 24, fasting and praying, asking God to warm his heart. The second date is June 12, 1994, the date when we must beg God to warm our hearts. How shall we live if we keep the greatest news in the world to ourselves? We sing He is the God of all Gods, the King of all Kings, the Lord of all Lords, but do we really believe it?

As you are going through life, you fall into a pit, and because I am a Baptist preacher, I want to make that a deep, dark nasty pit, and try as you might, you find it impossible to climb your way out of the pit. You have also been injured by the fall and you know you will never be the same. You hear a sound, and as your eyes adjust to the darkness you see that in the pit with you is a poisonous serpent. Not only are you sentenced to be in the pit, but every day there is a serpent shadowing you, attempting to slay you.

Before long, an animist appears. “Let me help you,”

he says, but then seeing the snake the animist cries, “You must have offended the gods. Because of that, they tripped you and made you fall into the pit. If I help you, the gods will be angry with me, too.” He turns and flees in terror.

Momentarily, another person comes along, a Hindu. The Hindu looks down at the pitiful figure in the hole and says, “You must understand the pit is but an illusion. You will never have any hope unless you know that. But in the next life, you may come back as the snake, and then you will have your revenge.” He, too, walks away.

Soon a Buddhist arrives on the scene. “You must cease struggling,” he cautions. “The reason you are in the pit is because you struggle. You must meditate, and realize that you will never attain Nirvana as long as you are angry about being in the pit.” As the Buddhist leaves, you ponder his words.

Soon there comes a man in a turban. “You are in the pit because you are an infidel, and Allah is angry with you. You will never get out of the pit.” As he pulls you to the top, he draws a sword and says, “You must now become a Muslim.” But you cry out that you could never do that.

With this bleak message you decide that if you must remain in the pit, you could at least try to lessen the pain of your dilemma. So, you have someone throw down a bottle, and then some pills, and even a hypodermic full of a drug that makes you forget you are in the pit. But eventually you awaken, and discover that not only are you in the pit, but that you also feel awful.

About the time you feel it is hopeless, there is no way of escape, up walks Jesus. There will be no put-downs. He is under no illusion about the reality of the pit. He dives into the pit and places Himself between you and the serpent. With His strength He lifts you out of the miry clay and puts your feet on the solid rock. Suddenly the snake goes to strike you, but instead bites the One who is in your place, and all the poison floods into His body. He is the One who has to die a slow, painful, agonizing, lonely death. And He dies in the pit.

You can't believe it. What a friend! What a man! What a hero! But three days later the earth begins to shake. Suddenly a sweet perfume fills the air and Jesus on the third day climbs out of pit. He is alive! And that, my friends, is not *one way* to God. That is not a *good teacher* or a *religious leader* or a *wonderful example*. That, my friends, is a *Savior*. He is King of all Kings, and Lord of all Lords. And all He has asked of me is to love Him and to share Him.