

SEPTEMBER 2004

# UPLOOK

• ASSESS THE NEED • CATCH THE VISION • TAKE THE CHALLENGE •

## ON TARGET

*Part Three*

**Talents, Things  
Truth & Time**

**STIRRING THE STEW**

*A fresh look  
at a key book:*

**NEGLECTED  
TRUTHS** *from*  
**ACTS**



# STIRRING THE STEW

*“What is that in thine hand?”*



Some passages of Scripture—and some preachers—give the impression that Christians should actually give up everything they own. But is that true? What Christians *should* do is give up ownership of everything they have. Therein lies a subtle but crucial difference. Paul would describe it in this cryptic paradox: *“as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”* (2 Cor. 6:10). He does not say we should be poor (although we acknowledge that some of our brothers and sisters *are* poor in material things). Instead Paul writes, *“as poor”*; we are to act *as if* we are poor—to be frugal with what we spend on ourselves, but lavish in the resources we invest in the great work of God, so that we are *“making many rich.”* Likewise he does not say that we have nothing, but that our lifestyle expresses the reality that every penny we have to use is not ours but His who bought us by His own blood. How can you be a steward if you have nothing to stew with?

This issue of *Uplook* includes articles on the four basic areas of Christian stewardship—our time, talents, things and truth. These form a comprehensive whole. One or two of them will not accomplish the massive task set before the Church. For example, investing large amounts of money without sacrificing men will not do it. Every assembly should be willing to give up the best servants they have to a wider ministry if the Spirit so directs. Can you imagine what it cost the Antioch assembly to loose Paul and Barnabas from local church involvement so they could fulfill the work to which He had called them? But how much poorer we all would be without the teaching and examples that these men provided. Antioch seemed to be a good-sized assembly, but think of the two smaller works in Lystra and Derbe willing to release Timothy (perhaps their brightest and most hopeful protégé).

Nor will it be a viable project if we send out servants without supplies. The servant should not be unwilling to “make tents” at times, but assemblies will be held to account for not faithfully supporting those whom they send, both with prayers and provisions. Some brethren seem to be working with a 1960s financial framework, feeling themselves to be quite generous when the gift barely covers travel costs. Of course these servants are looking to the Lord and are not expecting to be “paid for services rendered,” nor do they want to be burdensome to small or struggling groups to whom they minister. But in my experience there seems to be a direct relationship between material generosity on the part of believers and their spiritual enrichment by the Lord, who is no man’s debtor.

In addition, we should remember those who have not crossed oceans but are missionaries nonetheless, pioneer evangelists who remain virtually unknown to many North American assemblies. We should not expect them to spend time circulating among established assemblies in order to “become known” (hint, hint) so the Christians would be “exercised” about them (nudge, nudge). Of course it is the Lord who meets their needs and we know He can use ravens on occasion when His people are insensitive to the need, but His preferred method is to utilize the Lord’s people so they also are enriched in the process.

Yet sacrificing such able servants, and supporting them, will still come to nothing if the truth committed to us as a sacred trust (2 Tim. 2:2) is squandered. To let these truths “slip” (Heb. 2:1) or “dribble away” has been a danger since the first century, but never more so than in this age of doctrinal illiteracy and pragmatic compromise, when tolerance—even in divine things—is held as a virtue. God help us to speak the truth in love but never to forget that we are “*stewards of the mysteries of God*” (1 Cor. 4:1).

J. B. NICHOLSON, JR.

➔ There was such a response from the June issue that we reprinted more. If you would like extra copies, you may call the office at 616-456-9166 or email [Hazel@uplook.org](mailto:Hazel@uplook.org)

SEPTEMBER 2004

# UPLOOK

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- 1) by using the reminder envelope sent to facilitate your renewal;
  - 2) by using the form on our website at:  
[http://www.gospelcom.net/uplook/magazine\\_uplook/subscribe.phtml](http://www.gospelcom.net/uplook/magazine_uplook/subscribe.phtml)
  - 3) by contacting our office at any time, by phone, fax, mail or e-mail.
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We do not advise sending credit card numbers by e-mail. Please include your card number, expiry date and the amount in US dollars you wish to donate. Receipts are issued for all donations received and are valid for tax purposes in the US and Canada. Making a donation will automatically renew your *Uplook* subscription.

# PLEASE READ THIS FIRST!

*How important it is to begin by aligning ourselves under God.*

## Introduction

This issue is the result of a deep exercise that seems to have been growing simultaneously in the hearts of many North American believers. It cannot be stressed enough that if this burden is going to bear fruit for God (rather than being a mere topic of discussion), it must not be a stimulus to rely on the arm of flesh. Although Nehemiah responded to the need by moving to Jerusalem, assessing the project during his lonely night ride, calling the people to rise up and build, answering the criticisms (sure to surface whenever anything is attempted for God), and making suggestions as to how the work could most effectively progress, the following should also be noted:


- the first and essential step was made in the sanctuary: *“I sat down and wept, and mourned...and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven”* (Neh. 1:4). Nothing will happen without this.
- this praying encompassed worship, intercession, supplication, confession and a claiming of the promises of Scripture (see vv. 5-10).
- Nehemiah’s supplication concluded with his making himself available for the service of the Lord, whatever that might cost (v. 11)—including, obviously, a leave of absence from his employment for a time.

Once the necessary repair work was assessed and the people rallied to the work, it is obvious that there was constant contact with Headquarters. God was welcome to change any plans that His servants in good faith had made. In this the books of Nehemiah and Acts agree. The apostles planned and acted, first praying that the Lord would direct their steps. And He did exactly that. When they *“assayed to go into Bithynia”* (Acts 16:7), the Spirit’s redirection was most welcome. This conscious and constant aligning of themselves under the eye of God was key to their success. Nehemiah wrote when the work was finished in a mere fifty-two days: *“And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of*

*our God”* (6:16). In a similar way, Mark reminds us that *“they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them...”* (16:20). Luke states: *“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”* (2:47, NKJV); *“And the hand of the Lord was with them”* (11:21).

However, it should not be thought that we need a second call to do the work of preaching the gospel to every creature. God *“will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim. 2:4). To this end, Paul—who was only in Athens to rendezvous with his fellow workers—felt constrained to declare: *“God...now commandeth all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). Since the Church has received a “general call” to evangelize the world, why are some waiting for an “effectual call” to be personally involved in this great work? When 100 believers converged on Little Rock, AR, for a concerted gospel effort, some observers asked, “Why Little Rock?” To which we would politely respond, “Why not Little Rock, brother?” Surely every village, town and city was included in the Saviour’s great appeal to go with the gospel to every soul.

This does not negate what has previously been said. On occasion, the Lord will redirect our efforts. This we welcome. Who would not want to know that *“a great door and effectual”* had been opened to us, though *“there are many adversaries”* (1 Cor. 16:9)? How our hearts would thrill to hear the Lord of the vineyard tell us, as He told Paul concerning Corinth, *“I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city”* (Acts 18:10). Yet barring specific directives, we should do as the early believers did, *“everywhere preaching the Word”* (8:4).

It is our heart-felt desire that the following observations from Scripture and (hopefully) practical suggestions for implementing these principles will be a stimulus to us all—to contemplation, conviction, confession, communion, consecration and co-operation in this great work, and that it will be for the ultimate glory of God alone. 



# WHY THIS IS A GOLDEN MOMENT

*Five unequalled factors have converged in our path. They must be seized—or lost.*

## Setting the Stage

**H**istory provides opportune moments unequally. It is not every day that we may grasp them. See the upheaval in Congo, once fertile for missionary enterprise. The thrilling open door to Russia seems to be in the process of closing, forced shut by the very people who claim to be Christ's representatives. As well, freedoms here in the West, if unused, will be lost. And the rising tide of materialism in China may curtail gospel zeal there as communism never could.

There is a tide, in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune...  
On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures (W. Shakespeare).

Of course we would not question the graciousness of God. His longsuffering heart finds ways to turn back the clock, to "restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten" (Joel 2:25). Yet the Bible is full of incidents of missed opportunities and the warning to buy up the time, not gambling on the possibility of another chance, because "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1).

What makes this moment in history so strategic for assemblies of God's people? Here are a few suggestions:

1. We have an **unequalled opportunity** to take North America for Christ. Literacy is high. There are now more than 60 million foreign-born people on the continent, the highest number ever. This means that we can reach out to almost any mission field in the world—at our doorstep, and often in our language, with democratic liberties (for how long, we do not know).


2. We have an **unlimited range** of possible methods and ministries. Who, a century ago, could have guessed that we would have digital printing, television, radio, email, the world wide web, jet travel, mobile phones, let alone GPS, DVDs, MP3s, and whatever may be around the corner? Are we thinking how we may utilize these tools for Christ? It was believers who invented the *codex* or book as

we know it, and who first utilized printing. If we are going to serve our well-connected generation (see Acts 13:36), we certainly have been offered an array of tools to use in communicating the truth to them.

3. We have an **outstanding generation** of young champions. Generally, they have a wonderful combination of serious commitment to New Testament church truth and an eagerness to think in fresh but biblical ways about fulfilling the Commission. They seem to be energized, not enervated, by the challenge of struggling local churches. They are not prepared to bail out, increasing the problems. They want to be part of the solution. We salute all such "*vessels of honor*" and need to pray for, encourage, equip and support them every chance we get.

4. We have a **massive supply** of frozen assets. We have at our disposal many with latent spiritual ability and technical skills galore. We have multiplied millions in the bank and in real estate (a solemn stewardship). And although we complain of being habitually busy, our generation has more time to use as we wish than any previous age. We have rapid transit, time-saving devices, and most have substantial holidays. Our problem is in the time-wasting department. Christian fiction, TV watching, and recreational activities on occasion may have a place but, even if beneficial, they are profitable only "*for a little*" (1 Tim. 4:8).

5. We have a **strategic chance** to rethink the message which we proclaim. It has been said that the message does not change; only the methods do. But is that true? Certainly the essentials of the gospel must always be included. But the way the early Christians preached to Jewish Pharisees was different from the way they spoke to pagan Gentiles. We must understand how to communicate to our post-modern world. When we hand out tracts with stories of sea captains on sailing ships and missionaries in China, what are we saying? We can hardly blame our audience if they think Christianity is outdated and irrelevant. Now is the time to seize the opportunity!

*"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing"* (Mt. 24:46). 



# FRONTLINES

PRAY AROUND THE WORLD • PRAISE AROUND THE CLOCK

## THE TIMOTHY CONFERENCE 2004

**P**lan now to attend the 2004 Timothy Conference to be held in the will of the Lord Dec 28–31, 2004. The site for the proposed conference is the Sheraton Parkway North Hotel, Suites & Conference Centre in Richmond Hill, Ontario. The theme follows the words of the apostle Paul to his son Timothy: *“The things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim. 2:2). Speakers include Randy Amos, Dr. David Gooding, Roy Hill and Alan Parks. For more information, please contact Rod Joyce at [info@timothyconference.com](mailto:info@timothyconference.com)



### THANKSGIVING IN BC

The Wakesiah Thanksgiving Conference in Nanaimo, BC is scheduled for October 9-10, 2004. Speaker: Dr. Joe Mikhael (ON). Topic: Lessons from the Life of David. For more information, please contact:

Brian McKibbin at 250-758-6038  
[brimac1@shaw.ca](mailto:brimac1@shaw.ca)

### MT. HERMON CONFERENCE

The annual Pacific Coast Christian Conference will be held Oct 11-15 at the Mt. Hermon Conference Center (75 miles south of San Francisco, CA, in the Santa Cruz mountains). The conference begins with dinner Monday evening and ends Friday morning. Speakers: Ken Daughters (IA) and Alan Parks (SC). Contact: Max Kreiger at 323-256-1992  
[maxnbeth@juno.com](mailto:maxnbeth@juno.com)

### REGIONAL MISSIONS CONF.

A Regional Missions Conference is to be held Oct 16–17, 2004 at Cornerstone Bible Chapel, 190 Patricia Ave, Dunedin, FL. Times: Saturday

9:30–4:00 PM; Sunday 9:00–2:30 PM. Lunch will be provided both days. Speakers include: Paco Escarraman (interpreted by Al Adams), David Burson, Ken Brooks, Allen Tucker, Sheldon Crutchfield, and Dan Burson. For directions or more info.: Milton Hansen at 727-319-2229  
Bill Davis at 727-466-0991

### OAKVILLE BIBLE STUDIES

The Oakville (ON) Bible Study series has begun for the fall 2004 and spring 2005 season. This year the topic is “The Conquest of Canaan,” from Joshua and Judges. All studies held at Hopedale Bible Chapel, 342 Sherin Dr., Oakville, ON. Registration at 8:30 AM. Studies commence at 9:00 AM, and finish at noon. Notes provided; tapes available. Speakers and topics:

- Oct 16, W. Yuille (ON)  
Entering the Land
- Nov 20, W. H. Burnett (ON)  
Possessing the Land
- Dec 11, B. Gunning (ON)  
The Closing Days of Joshua

- Jan 15, J. B. Nicholson, Parallels between Joshua and Judges
- Feb 19, J. Mikhael (ON)  
Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah
- Mar 19, S. Burnett (ON)  
Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah
- Apr 16, W. H. Burnett (ON)  
Samson; Review of the Study Year  
For more information, contact:  
W. H. Burnett at 905-827-4842  
[wh.burnett@sympatico.ca](mailto:wh.burnett@sympatico.ca)  
H. W. Allison at 905-336-8101  
[hw.allison@sympatico.ca](mailto:hw.allison@sympatico.ca)  
(for registration and tapes)

### KENTUCKY FELLOWSHIP

A regional one-day conference will be held Oct 16 at Clear Creek Park in Shelbyville, Kentucky from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Guest speaker is Joe Reese (ON). Nathan Thomas (Ventriloquist from OH) will lead the children’s program. Nursery and lunch will be provided. For additional information, or to request a brochure, contact:  
Jim Harmon at 859-626-8509  
[JamesHarmon@bellsouth.net](mailto:JamesHarmon@bellsouth.net)

**IROQUOINA RETREATS**

The following is the 2004-2005 retreat schedule for Camp Iroquoina.

Fall Teen Getaway	10/22-24, 2004
Father/Son retreat	11/12-14
College & Career	12/31-1/2, 2005
Jr. High 1	1/14-16
Jr. High 2	1/28-30
Sr. High	2/4-6
Family Retreat	2/19-21
Men's retreat	3/11-12
Ladies Retreat	4/29-5/1
Retreakend	5/20-22

Mark Thomas at 570-967-2577  
metebthomas@juno.com

**YONKERS OPEN HOUSE**

The Yonkers Gospel Mission is having its annual open house on Saturday, Oct 23, 2004, at 191 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY. Their speaker will be James Cochran (BC). Tours of the mission will begin at 4:30 PM, dinner at 5:30 PM, and service at 7:00 PM. Come and see what the Lord is doing in the lives of these homeless men; also enjoy a great time of food, fellowship, special music and wonderful teaching. For more info. or directions call:

(914) 968-6577  
yonkersmission@cs.com

**OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE**

The believers at East Tulsa (OK) Bible Chapel are planning, Lord willing, a conference Oct 23-24. The invited speaker is Harold Summers (BC). All are welcome. Contact: Baer Bell at 918-249-9231  
bellb@osu-okmulgee.edu

**FL MISSIONARY CONF.**

A warm invitation is extended to attend the 37th Annual Women's Missionary Conference at Park of the Palms, Keystone Heights, FL, on Oct 29-30. On Saturday, separate meetings for men and women, so husbands are invited as well. Contact: Helen Pinches at 352-473-6393  
mompinch@aol.com

**BRANDYWINE FALL CONF.**

Brandywine (DE) Bible Chapel plans to host their fall conference Nov 5-7. Speakers: Doug Kazen (WA), Mike Attwood (GA) and Mark Kolchin (NJ). Conference starts Friday at 7:30 PM with a Bible Reading (1 Cor. 14:1-20). On Saturday and Sunday, ministry meetings from 2:00 PM to 5:45 PM. Dinner and Fellowship to follow each day. Call Sid Bhatt at 302-723-2155 for directions.

**FATHER/SON WEEKEND**

Fathers and sons are invited to Camp Iroquoina (PA) for a Father & Son retreat Nov 12-14. The camp's new manager, Mark Thomas, will be the speaker. He brings many years of ministry experience with assemblies and camp work. Look forward to hearing some interesting stories and perhaps even a chalk talk. Contact: Mark at 570-967-2577  
campiroquoina@epix.net  
www.iroquoina.org

**WORD ALIVE SOUTHEAST**

Schedule for the Fall season: Main sessions from 9 AM-2 PM. Bible readings in Col. 2 from 2-3 PM. Lunch provided. All meetings held at Washington (GA) Bible Chapel, 808 E. Robert Toombs Ave. Speakers: Nov 13, John Heller on Pioneering a New Work; Dec 12, Rex Trogdon on 1 John; Charles Oxendine on Esther. Mike Attwood at 706-678-3180  
Sam Thorpe at 706-359-6297

**INTEREST IN LAKELAND, FL**

Austin and Sarah Temperley have recently moved to Lakeland, Florida. They are wondering if there are any interested Christians who would like

**MYRTLE BEACH NEW YEAR CONFERENCE**

**E**xpect rich ministry, warm fellowship, balmy weather, time to relax and enjoy the beautiful ocean views. A New Year conference with a difference. Teaching ministry in the morning and evening with organized recreation in the afternoons.

*Speakers:* **Mike Attwood** (GA) and **Jim McKendrick** (MI).

*Dates:* **Dec 31, 2004-Jan 1, 2005.** Registration on Dec 30, Checkout on Jan 2

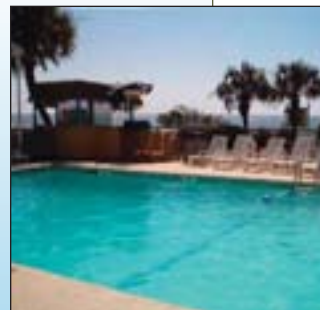
Space is limited so book now! Two-bedroom condominium-style ocean-view accommodations (up to quad occupancy) with meal plan approx. \$125.00 (US) per person (price includes meals and accommodations). **Contact regional registrars for more information:**

Mark Hartley: NC (919) 477-0779

Sid Bhatt: DE/PA/NJ (302)723-2155

Scott Tucker: SC (843) 650-8975

Larry Price: FL (352)735-2729



*Come down from the cold; come up from the heat!*

**YOU DON'T SAY:** Scripps Howard News Service profiled lawyer James Kelley (DC), one of a group at his local church who are enthusiastic Episcopalians but who do not believe in God. Said Kelley, "We all love the incense, the stained glass windows, the organ music, the vestments, and all of that. It's drama. It's aesthetics. It's the ritual. That's neat stuff. I don't want to give all that up just because I don't believe in God."

to come together and break bread or possibly start a meeting there. The Temperleys both teach at Lakeland Christian School and the nearest assembly is about an hour away.

They can be contacted at:

3542 Raintree Ct.

Lakeland, FL 22803

863-409-1664

soon2734@hotmail.com

sa4grace@hotmail.com

### **LEBANON OPPORTUNITY**

In the mountains of Lebanon is the Constant Lighthouse High School, founded by Adib Daghfal in 1976 to reach the children of Lebanon for Christ. Licensed by the Lebanese government and offering an American curriculum, the school has grades from K–High School. The high school grades, however, are not currently in operation because of the lack of qualified Christian teachers. Opportunities for sharing the gospel with both students and parents. Most teaching positions do not require college degree. Housing available. Call 815-886-4152

CCLHL@hotmail.com

### **SIoux FALLS OUTREACH**

Larry Sax writes: "The park ministry went well...The door-to-door work was well received by the neighborhood. We were greeted with friendly attitudes and courtesy. Several people expressed interest in spiritual things and many believers encouraged us in the work we were doing. On Sunday...night our six-year-old son expressed a desire to

become a Christian...We thank God for each of these blessings...[We have a long list of] promising contacts. Please pray diligently that God will continue the work in their lives...O what a precious privilege to be used of God to lead people to Christ and encourage believers to walk with Him. Thank you to those who labored in prayer, park ministry, gospel meetings, and door-to-door work. Please pray that we would redeem our time...Please pray also for fellow laborers...and that the Lord would do the work of adding to His church here in Sioux Falls, SD."

### **HOMECALLS**

#### ***Timothy Benson***

Timothy Benson, 48, a faithful servant, was called home to be with the Lord, Jul 17, 2004. Tim had been serving the Lord faithfully as an elder in the assembly at Elk Creek, Kentucky near Louisville for the past six years. He will be greatly missed in the work there, but we rejoice with his wife, Annalene, and his children, Luke, Sarah, Jesse, and Angel that he is at home with the Lord. Please pray earnestly for the family and for the small assembly there.

#### ***Joseph O'Neill***

Colin Burnett writes from Ireland: "This past week we lost a dear friend of five years. Joseph O'Neill passed into the presence of the Lord on Tuesday morning from a heart attack. Joseph was a big part of the meeting here in Newcastle West and will be missed...Peggy (Joseph's sis-

ter) said that if she was going to have that many family and friends in her house, she wanted them to hear the gospel. At the wake on Wednesday night, we had a time of prayer and a short gospel message. After this, one of the family said, 'You people have something we Catholics don't have; it makes our thing look like a big joke.' Thankfully many family and friends were touched by the night.

The next day at the funeral, we talked of rejoicing since we knew where Joseph was. This kind of talk is foreign at a Catholic funeral. The gospel was again presented and over 100 heard of the saving faith that Joseph had. It is truly the grace of God that in his death Joseph reached more with the gospel than in his life.

A cousin of Joseph's who is a believer said that this was the first Christian funeral held in the family, and that he expects to see fruit from this. We would ask prayer for Peggy as she is now the only Christian in the immediate family.

#### ***Paul B. Parmer***

Suddenly, Paul Parmer, 51, was taken home to glory on May 26. A lifelong resident of Burlington, CO, Paul was active in many Bible camps and DVBS. He also was known as an empathetic visitor. He is survived by his father, Pen Parmer, also a long-time servant of the Lord and two sisters. Brethren Keith Trevolt and George Farber took part in the funeral.

### **LAND FOR SALE**

For sale, four wooded acres with in a few miles of the Cumberland Bible Chapel in Summerfield, TN. For more information, call:

231-788-0815





# THE NEGLECTED MIDDLE TIER

*We've got fizzle, not sizzle. What's missing in the mix?*

## from the Editor

Surrounded by a roomful of eager young disciples, I had just finished “waving the flag” for the idea of meeting according to the Church pattern as laid out for us in the New Testament. It was not only a good theological idea, I told them passionately; it was a good practical idea as well. The Church, as the Lord designed it, was persecution-proof; ideal for the rapid deployment of the gospel; structured to minimize the glory of man and maximize the glory of Christ. It would work among tribal peoples, in prison camps, and among the disenfranchised poor in inner cities. It was simple, functional, and beautiful. It even seems to be designed so a bad assembly could be a good school, teaching me grace, patience, longsuffering, love—in short, Christlikeness—just what I need.

*We often appear to have mechanics without dynamics, the principles without the power. Is there more to discover about the Church in the book of Acts? Is it time for Powerscourt II?*

An older Christian nearby (whom I suspect was unhappy with my zeal for what he considered to be an unacceptable *status quo*) asked pointedly: “Do you think [John Nelson] Darby had it all right?”

Well, no. We are thankful for his helpful translations, his tireless gospel work, his voluminous commentaries and his lofty hymns. But I don't believe Darby had it entirely right, especially regarding the concepts of the church in ruins, corporate defilement *ad infinitum*, and exclusive reception policies.

“Oh, but *you* have it all right?” he returned, his voice with, I thought, a scalped edge to it.

My response at that time: “Well, brother, if there are areas of concern, tell us, and we'll compare them with

Scripture to see what the truth really is.”

End of conversation.

But it was not the end of my thinking on the matter. Was it possible that the things we *HAD SEEN* were true—beautiful, lofty, gripping truths like the priesthood of all believers and the practical headship of Christ—but that the weakness in much assembly life at present had to do with *WHAT WE WERE NOT SEEING*?

Careful observers of the New Testament writings concerning the early Church will notice three distinct tiers of information, although there is some blending between the various levels. I would like to suggest for your prayerful consideration that many who think of themselves as New Testament assemblies have a good grasp of two out of those three tiers. But the middle tier seems to be neglected in our thinking these days.

## THE BASIC TIER 1 TRUTHS

At the most basic level, there is historical and cultural data. All believers notice these facts. We see the way in which the early believers spoke, the territory they covered, and the modes of travel they used. We notice the current issues they faced—such as not eating food offered to idols, their painful disengagement from Jewish national life, and their clashes with the pagan philosophies and lifestyles.

This information is not trivia. We should be inspired by the prodigious work done by a handful of believers with limited resources against massive opposition. And we may learn much from it. Some cultures around the world still struggle with the problem of food offered to idols. The arguments used against Jewish legalism and Greek philosophy are useful for similar antagonists to the gospel today.

But hopefully most of us understand that the Lord is not subtly telling us by including this tier to use only parchments, wear cloaks and sandals, speak *koiné* Greek, or travel by sailing ships, because the apostles did these things. Yet there are principles which we may apply today.

## THOSE BLESSED TIER 3 TRUTHS

It has generally been agreed that certain New Testament truths were almost completely lost to the Church at large for hundreds of years. Miller's *Church History* and

Broadbent's *Pilgrim Church* unearth marginal groups, persecuted and despised by both civil authorities and state churches, who had varying degrees of light on some of these truths. But it was not until the early 1800s that the wraps came off these family treasures, long covered with the dust of years and stored away, neglected and forgotten.

It is not this issue's intention to focus on these breath-taking truths; they are (or should be) well known to *Uplook* readers. They include: the aforementioned practical headship of Christ and the priesthood of all believers; the presidency of the Holy Spirit; the final authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice; the centrality of the weekly remembrance of the Lord; the plurality of spiritual elders; the organic unity and giftedness of each member of the one Body; the blessed hope of soon being with and like Christ; and the autonomy of each local assembly. We might also add the crucial distinction between Israel, the Kingdom and the Church, however many dispensations one might recognize.


Along with these we should keep in mind those general doctrines not specifically related to Church life but recognized as orthodox truth by every true believer. For example, the trinity and unity of the Godhead; the full deity and perfect humanity of Christ; salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ; the everlasting blessedness of the believing and the everlasting woe of the unrepentant, etc.

These magnificent revelations from the heart of God

can never be taught too often nor held too dear. We are not calling for a minimizing of these blessed truths in any way. Shout them from the housetops. Weave them into your thanksgiving. Teach them to your children. Believe them with all your heart. But in embracing these blessings, are we missing other vital parts to God's present program for the Church?

### THE MISSING MIDDLE TIER

It would be, I think, a valuable exercise for the Lord's people who are serious about New Testament living to open to the book of Acts with this prayer on their lips: "Lord, show us *every detail* in this book. Keep us from assuming that we know it all. Teach us what we're missing and then give us the courage and wisdom to live out *all* the counsel of God."

On the following pages I want to suggest fifteen truths well nigh lost from much assembly life in North America. These are principles and practices which we need to see and seek to practice; some may have seen some of these, although most would acknowledge there is still room for improvement. (If you are doing some of these, please don't be satisfied until you're doing them all!) May the Lord Jesus grant us much grace to happily embrace whatever truth the Spirit may reveal to us from the Word—just as the early believers did (Acts 2:41). 

## THE NEED OF THE HOUR

**Go, stand and speak...ALL the words of this life.  
Acts 5:20**

*True to the Faith*  
is available from  
Gospel Folio Press at  
800-952-2382



**T**he risen Lord, who commissioned [the apostles], lives still. His objectives are the same, His vigor undiminished. The Holy Spirit who led the apostles in their definition of the essentials of the Christian gospel in the apostolic age, still expects from all followers of the living Lord the same loyalty to those essentials. Time has not worn down the words of this imperishable Life, nor dimmed the hope they proclaim, nor reduced their relevance to our modern world, which in spite of its sophistications comes more and more in outlook and behavior to resemble the first-century world in which Christianity

was born. Under the ever-increasing flood of modern scientific and technological discoveries, people's capacity to retain a knowledge of the past grows understandably less and less. Their outlook is thus in danger of becoming historically parochial, and their grasp of historical, essential Christianity so insecure that they could, all unwittingly, come to regard as the Christian gospel forms of Christianity from which the very heart has been cut out.

—from the Author's Preface of David Gooding's outstanding commentary on Acts, TRUE TO THE FAITH

# THINKING BIG

*We need David thinking in a Goliath world.*

## Acts 1:6-8

**H**ow does the book of Acts begin? The disciples asked the Saviour (only moments from leaving), “*Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (v. 6). He responded, “*Ye shall receive power...and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (v. 8).

They were thinking small—of Israel; the Lord was thinking big—of the whole world. They were thinking about the past and restoring it; He was thinking about the present and redeeming it. They were thinking defensively; He was thinking offensively. They were longing for Israel. But He longed for the whole aching planet to come to Him.

Whose view won the day? Obviously it was the disciples that caught the Saviour’s vision. A short time later, Paul could write: “*Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*” (Rom. 1:8). More than that, “*The gospel...was preached to every creature which is under heaven*” (Col. 1:23)!

Please note what I am *not* saying. This is no call for a man-designed, man-driven mass movement or for large religious pep rallies or for assemblies a mile wide and an inch thick. Apart from the initial gathering in Jerusalem (which was scattered—purposefully, the Greek suggests), it seems the majority of assemblies were not large. Many met in houses. Like a body, size has its healthy limits. How can shepherds know hundreds of sheep well enough to meet their needs?

But what I wish to say is that the early believers knew the Commission was for them personally, for their day. Does each of us know that? Do we wake every morning with this in mind? Whatever else I do for me, for mine, or for my employer, my Number 1 reason for living today is to do the will of the One who died for me. His will is that I



be a witness for Him everywhere I go and to those I meet. That’s what New Testament believers thought He meant and so that’s what they did: “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4). Ignoring the impossibilities, they took Him at face value.

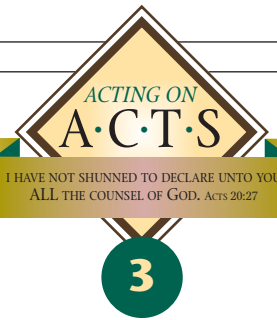
Is it possible to reach every creature in each generation? Jesus thought so. But if we are to do it in our day, there’s no time to lose. As never before, “*the harvest truly is great*”; “*the fields are white unto harvest*”; “*the laborers are few*”; and “*the time is short*.”

Let’s think big. Suppose I said, “Imagine if the Lord gave assemblies in North America 10,000 new baby lambs to look after in the coming month.” Is that thinking big? Hardly. Assuming only the 1200 New Testament assemblies across the continent that I know about, that’s just six or seven lambs each. By contrast, the 120 *believers* (not *assemblies*) in the early chapters of Acts were given more than 8,000 lambs the first week! Now there’s a challenge. But the Lord thought they, with the Spirit’s help, could handle it. And somehow they did. But these thousands

were just the beginning of the harvest; what would that be out of the 300 million in North America? Or more than six billion worldwide?

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Our prayers need to be larger: “*for all [mankind]*” (1 Tim. 2:1). Our vision of what the Lord wants to do through us *personally* needs to be greater. Our assemblies need to be more strategic, using our time more wisely, finding better ways to broadcast the seed. We need to support our pioneer evangelists better, practically and prayerfully. We need to become better informed about the people around us and the opportunities available. And we need to obey the Lord’s command to be witnesses unto Him, seeking His blessing on His Word which He says shall not “*return void*.”



# A UNITED STRATEGY

*Autonomy has become independency. It's time to work together.*

**Acts 14:21-23; 20:17-35**

**W**ithout cell phones, email, or faxes, the early believers kept in touch. It seems from his writings that Paul knew the spiritual state of most if not every assembly within his sphere of influence. Although constantly harassed by civil and religious authorities, the Christians doggedly pursued their goal of world evangelization. The Jewish Sanhedrin, the Roman Empire, the Gates of Hell, could not stop them. Occasionally it looked like one thing would stop them—division (Acts 6:1-5; also chs. 11 and 15)! But the matters were wisely and quickly resolved, and the gospel work continued unabated.

*“How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...there the Lord commanded the blessing”* (Ps. 133:1, 3). I know there are challenges, but if there is any place that those committed to the principles of New Testament gathering should be able to unite, it should be around the gospel banner and against our common foe. Blessed (though often bloodied) are the peacemakers.

We were heartened by the hundred intrepid souls who gathered from various assemblies to labor together in the gospel in Minot, ND. We salute them for their courage and grace, trusting the Lord inspires many more co-operative efforts like this. I dare say it brought joy to the heart of the One who prayed, *“That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me”* (Jn. 17:21).

That last phrase reminds us that we cannot expect the sinner to believe he can be reconciled to a holy God if we cannot even be reconciled to one another. And if we have the Lord's approval, what is the criticism of men? *“A very small thing”* indeed (1 Cor. 4:3).

I understand the problems: what kind of gospel effort; what kind of music, if any; what kind of dress for participants; and the nature of the assembly that hopefully will result. But surely reasonable brethren can discuss and resolve these matters when the honor of God, the salvation of souls, and the blessing of the saints lie in the balance. As Paul would write: *“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [mature], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you”* (Phil.

3:15). Paul was not expecting some Christians to relinquish God-given convictions based on clear biblical truth; but if it is the Lord's work and we are His servants, surely He can show us all how He wants it to be done.

So what would a united New Testament-style strategy look like? Here are a few suggestions.

**1. We would follow their path.** Let's look at the way the apostles worked. In Acts 14, Luke lays it out for us in point form so we don't miss it: *“And when they had PREACHED THE GOSPEL to that city, and had TAUGHT MANY, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, CONFIRMING THE SOULS of the disciples, and EXHORTING THEM to continue in the faith, and [WARNING THEM] that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ORDAINED THEM ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH, and had PRAYED WITH FASTING, they COMMENDED THEM to the Lord, on whom they believed”* (vv. 21-23). There it is: preaching, teaching, confirming, exhorting, warning, recognizing, praying and commending. It took differing amounts of time to accomplish this (several weeks to two years). But they began with unbelievers and left with functioning elders within that time frame.

This has been done in modern times as well. Read J. J. Rouse's *Pioneer Work in Canada* or the biography of Donald Ross. The work of Oliver Smith in Iowa is a good example of persistent and effective gospel work followed by the establishment of assemblies, as are the concerted efforts in Newfoundland. The early days in North Carolina proved fruitful ground when evangelists were followed by those who shepherded and instructed new believers. Southwestern Ontario has examples where John Martin and his fellow workers have labored. And this field was the inspiration for the establishment of scores of works in Belgium in a relatively short period of time. But it is no part-time hobby. It is real work. Team work. The Lord's work.

In his book *It Can Be Done*, William Williams tells of the way a handful of missionaries took on the challenge of the country of Venezuela. In one generation they thoroughly evangelized it, preaching the gospel in every city, town and village in the country. There is no reason it cannot be done here as well. The thrilling works in many other countries could also be cited.

**2. No one would need to work alone.** I know servants of the Lord in North America who are great evangelists. They see people saved. But the baby lambs drift off after a while, looking for grass because they are not being fed. Who will move to such places, get a job to pay the bills, and then minister to these fledgling believers through teaching the Word?

O that the Lord would raise up an army of young couples willing, like Priscilla and Aquila, to move to new areas, get tent-making jobs, then use their homes as beachheads for the gospel and havens for new believers (see Acts 18:18). But how much better if at least two couples could labor together in establishing new outposts for the Lord.

If Christians, instead of playing in the shallows, will “launch out into the deep” to catch “a draught of fishes,” not just ones and twos, they will need our help. “And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships” (see Lk. 5:1-7).

At present a few couples are seeking to do just this, but I fear they receive little encouragement. They need our regular prayers, plus calls, visits, and practical ministry. They should not feel they are laboring alone and forgotten (see note from Lakeland, FL in Front Lines, for example).

**3. We would see North America as a mission field.** If a missionary came from some other continent, we would find it quite appropriate if he used a map with locations marked to show existing assemblies and areas where work was needed. But do we get out our maps to look at North America? Do we have the facts about the people groups in the area where we are hoping to evangelize? Do we study the beliefs of those we long to see saved?

The early believers certainly had done their homework. Paul capitalized on the differences in belief between Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 22). He knew what the Stoics and Epicureans believed as well as the Jews gathered at Mars’ Hill (Acts 17). And John had to understand the Gnostic philosophy in order to effectively answer its false claims. We shouldn’t expend our lives learning about

every cult, but we should care enough to learn the mental impediments that people have in coming to Christ. The Bible has a specific answer to every specific challenge, whether to the cults that visit our doors (to whom we must speak with both grace and truth) or those waves of Hindus, Moslems and Buddhists flooding our countries.


**4. We would keep in touch better.** I spoke to a pioneer in Montana recently. I asked, “Would you say that there are about 20 assemblies in North America that even know you exist?” He thought that was about right. But it’s *not* right. We need to be better informed, be in touch

**ARE YOU PRAYING FOR MEMPHIS, TN, THAT GOD WILL DO A NEW THING THERE? FOR PHOENIX (NOW 75 MILES ACROSS) WITH ONE SMALL ASSEMBLY? OR ITS SUBURB, MESA, WHICH HAS NOW PASSED THE POPULATION OF ATLANTA? FOR MOBILE, AL, AND STOCKTON, CA, FOR TALLAHASSEE AND PENSACOLA, FL? AND WHO IS INTERCEDING FOR PUEBLO, CO AND KALAMAZOO, MI? EVEN IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO, WHAT ABOUT FORT ERIE AND GRIMSBY? THINK OF THE “FOREIGN MISSION FIELD” OF QUEBEC AND THE DESPERATE NEED AMONG NATIVE PEOPLES, THE BURGEONING HISPANIC, ASIAN, ARAB & AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATIONS**

more, help each other more. Of course that means we’ll have to do other things less to free up our resources. But what an encouragement it would be if each week we asked a smaller assembly for their prayer list, and called an isolated worker somewhere to pass on some much needed encouragement. This will become increasingly important as we pray and plan to see the Lord thrust hundreds of workers

out into the white harvest fields on this continent.

**5. We would share resources.** The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) is a good example of responsible brethren with a mutual concern, meeting to maintain a co-ordinated and united front against the enemy. Would it not be wise for like-minded men involved in the care of God’s people to meet regularly and regionally? They would not only want a time for prayer, encouragement (through the Word and positive reports of the Lord’s blessing); there should be times to speak of needs to be met in struggling area assemblies and how best to help them—not always by sending Sunday speakers. They may need help fixing up their building. Or a visit from our young people to help with a children’s outreach. Or their struggling elders may need a prayer, discussion, and encouragement time with other elders.

Let’s remember that there are *two* aspects to the life of the Body. Our interconnectedness is not only at the local church level but with other assemblies of believers as well (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:12). 

# CEASELESS WITNESS

*We all have a strategic part to play in the Big Rescue Operation.*



I just asked a highly committed young disciple what he thought the Great Commission meant for him personally. His response: “to shine for the Lord where I live.” It is certainly true that the Lord desires that we function as lights where we are. But how does “where I live” relate to going “*into all the world*”? If each of us stays where we are, how will they see the light in areas still in the dark?

This does not mean that everyone is called across the world, but I think it does mean that everyone is called at least across the street—maybe even across their city, state or province.

There has clearly been a retreat from the idea that every person in the world is either a missionary or a mission field. Many Christians feel that it is not their gift; only certain specially-equipped individuals are qualified for this work of evangelism. Let them do it; I’m not cut out for it, we say.

Some valiantly show up for neighborhood “cold call” door knocking with all the joy of a dental patient submitting for root canal surgery. Others haltingly leave a tract or two behind at restaurants or perhaps feel their obligation is fulfilled by attending a weekly gospel meeting.

Of course the Lord will find a way to use every little bit done for Him, but is this enough?

Some assemblies, feeling collective guilt over a lack of personal gospel work, may invite a dynamic evangelist to show them how to do it. And this can be very helpful—if the evangelist doesn’t give the impression that everyone must be a fearless frontline combatant like he is. Instead he should let them know that there is room for everyone on the team. There are unlimited possibilities.

Not every believer in New Testament days was a gifted evangelist, nor did everyone do it the same way. But notice, “*They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4). The commission to go “*into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk. 16:15) includes you and me. We are not all evangelists, but we are all to be witnesses. If we are willing to be involved, God will give us each a custom-designed way to fulfill it.

There are sisters in Belfast who send a comfort card and gospel literature to every bereaved family listed in the obit-

uary columns of their newspapers. An aged “retired” missionary in Cardiff sends greetings to local Muslim families with an offer of a Bible course. There are jail ministries, hospitals and senior homes to visit, evangelistic Bible studies, radio and local public access TV (often for free). There are neighborhood kid’s clubs, after-school outreaches, and a million more opportunities. For those already involved, our prayer for you is that you might be “*...fruitful in every good work*” (Col. 1:10).



And for those not yet involved? Note the words of Ephesians 6:15, “*...your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*” How do we prepare our feet for taking the gospel? For “*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*” (Rom. 10:15).

Do you believe your neighbors and work-mates are lost? Then make a prayer list of those you want to see saved. Surely this is the first evidence that we care about their plight. Then buy some good gospel tracts or get an audio tape with a good gospel message to hand out. Write out your testimony, simply, clearly, with as little “Christianese” as possible, to give away (have it proof-read first). Ask the Lord every day for boldness (Acts 4:29), for “*utterance*” (Eph. 6:19), *i.e.*, the right thing to say, and for God-arranged opportunities. Go into the day thinking of something you especially enjoy about God’s salvation (*Now That’s Amazing Grace* by William MacDonald or *Key Bible Concepts* by David Gooding and John Lennox will help you) and ask the Lord to let someone bring up the subject. He can and will do it! I know; I’ve asked Him.

Death to excuses and the desire that the lost think well of us! People in hell hope you’ll witness to their relatives (Lk. 16:27-28). Don’t wait till you have all the answers; by then you’ll be in heaven. No one needs the gospel there.

Barring unusual circumstances (*eg.*, all in your assembly have been struck dumb), can you claim to be a New Testament church if the Christians in your local fellowship are not being taught how nor expected to share the gospel every day? That’s what Acts Christianity looks like!

# YES, GOOD WORKS

*Good works and the gospel are the winning combo. Let's team up!*

**W**hen Mother Teresa and Princess Diana died within days of each other, it was evident that their lives had virtually nothing in common, except this: they both were known for doing good works. It was obvious from its response that the world still appreciates good works.

Isn't it amazing how much of our Lord's earthly ministry was involved in doing good works? He *"went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38), tirelessly ministering to the needs of others. And this was a pattern that the early believers followed. For example, *"There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha...this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds"* (Acts 9:36). Her winsome ministry softened the ground along the Sharon Plain so that Peter's seeding bore a mighty harvest. It could be the same today, couldn't it?

We have rightly preached against good works as a *means* of salvation. They are non-meritorious. Although we should not give the impression in our gospel preaching that good works are a bad thing. Recall Cornelius, whose prayers and almsgiving had come up as a memorial before God (Acts 10:4). Please also note, those who say that God does not hear the prayers of the unconverted!

We have also correctly opposed good works as a *substitute* for the gospel—the so-called social gospel. No doubt it is easy to get distracted by social programs that meet only the needs of the body and neglect the eternal soul.

But having said that, Ephesians 2 links salvation by grace apart from works with the following words: *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (v. 10). The busyness of our lives, increasing isolation in society, and an assumption that governments (or social agencies) now handle the good works department, has neutralized one of our greatest assets for winning souls.

A young believer I knew, who was saved out of a very dysfunctional home, took as his key verse, *"Love never fails."* He set about to win his hardened family with deeds of kindness. He looked after his debilitated father, bathing and shaving him as his father would curse him. But love never fails, and his father was won to Christ. His twin brother (who beat him unmercifully when he told the



family he had been saved) was reached in prison. Then his sister. One by one they succumbed to loving works that opened their hearts to the Saviour's entrance.


When he would take tracts door-to-door, he carried a trash bag to pick up garbage along the way, because, as he said, *"They don't care about my tract, but they do care about their trash. Maybe if I pick up the one, they'll pick up the other."* Because love never fails.

I think half the saints feel disenfranchised. They find it very difficult to communicate the gospel to strangers. But they would be thrilled to show some practical kindness to a sick or needy neighbor. *"These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men"* (Titus 3:8). And who is my neighbor? (I know the answer because I read the story.) Anyone who crosses my path who has a need that I can meet.

What happens when we do some good deed? *"...they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16). You must give the Lord the credit, of course; otherwise they will think you are just a good person. But Paul links good works with our fruitfulness! Is it possible that we are unfruitful in the gospel because we do not *"maintain good works"*? (Titus 3:14).

Our Christians should be encouraged in this (see article on 2:42 Fellowship). We need to *"provoke [each other] unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24). Those who are rich (who isn't rich in North America, relatively speaking?) are to be charged, *"That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate"* (1 Tim. 6:18). When was the last time you heard *that* preached?

Widows over the age of 60 who have, during their married lives, been known for good works are a blue chip resource in the church. They should not, after their husband dies, be forced to eke out an existence. They should be financially supported to do visitation and good works in the community. So says the Scripture (1 Tim. 5:3-10).

*"...Our Saviour Jesus Christ...gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works"* (Titus 2:13-14). 



# EVANGELIST vs. PASTOR?

*We need both these gifts for advancing the cause. Where are they?*

In writing to the Ephesian saints, Paul sketched out for them the progression of workers needed to establish the Church. This list is quite different to the ones given in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Notice the following:

	Rom. 12/1 Cor. 12	Eph. 4
The Giver	The Spirit	Christ
The gift	supernatural abilities	gifted men
Beneficiaries	your local church	the Body

There seems to be a specific order in that list: “*And [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Eph. 4:11-12). The apostles came first, trained by the Lord. Then the prophets gave us “*the apostles’ doctrine*” in written form, as moved by the Holy Spirit. So that today, while we do not have these men among us, we have their teaching—really Christ’s teaching through them—in the Word of God. This is our “apostolic authority.”


These first two were *foundation* gifts (Eph. 2:20) while the others are *maturation* gifts. And the first maturation gift was the evangelist. It should be noted that, while there are local evangelists working in the context of a particular local church, the men spoken of in Ephesians 4 have a ministry wider than any local assembly. These evangelists went into uncharted territory.

Paul loved to take the evangel to regions where Christ was unknown: “*Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation*” (Rom. 15:20). But it seems today (I say this in kindness) that many men gifted in the gospel and commended to evangelism have gone “into all the *assemblies* to preach the gospel” or else ended up on the conference circuit. I can think of at least twenty good men in this category. If we asked them what new areas of the continent they have plowed up during the last decade, what would they say? The answer is, virtually nothing.

Why is this? For one thing, pioneer evangelists are the forgotten men. If they went to a foreign land, they would be remembered. But here—I’ve heard it said—why don’t they get a job? And of course for some of them it is the will of God that they have a tent-making arrangement. But that should not always be the case. “*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*” (1 Cor. 9:14). In plain terms that means we should be caring financially for these pioneers. But do we? My judgment is: not very well. Many of us would hardly know their names. That needs to be rectified, and in a hurry.

What happens as a result? A traffic jam in this Ephesians 4 process! When the evangelists don’t thrust out into new areas (see the article on the leading of the Spirit), there are no new gatherings of believers. Then what do those gifted as pastors do? Because very few new works are being started, men with pastoral gift end up becoming resident in existing assemblies, where their “job description” is identical to that of the elders. A gift intended for helping a group of new believers ends up duplicating the work supposed to be done by the elders in a mature assembly.

True evangelists find it hard to answer the endless questions of new believers; they want to get on with the gospel. But someone needs to care for these lambs. That’s why Paul had men like Timothy and Titus along—true pastors—to stay after the initial gospel thrust to care for the converts and see a proper assembly established. Their intention, as *pro tem* elders, was to work themselves out of a job as soon as a group of spiritual shepherds were raised up by the Lord. These pastors then moved on to do the same thing again somewhere else.

Is this the pattern we are following today? I’m afraid not. In many places the lines between gifts are blurred; we ask the same speaker to preach “gospel in the morning and ministry at night.” A spirit of competition has developed: resident pastors vs. itinerant evangelists and teachers. This ought not to be. All are needed, but each in the proper sphere. God help us in this. We need to see this three-step approach again: evangelists, pastors, teachers. 





# DISCIPLE-MAKING

*The biggest challenge. The best investment. The crying need.*



**N**o one suggests that it is easy to do. Or demands little of you. Or is guaranteed to succeed every time. But two things are for sure: the Lord Jesus commanded disciple-making and the New Testament churches practiced it.

Here is the command: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”* (Mt. 28:19-20, NKJV). A disciple is a follower, a learner, an imitator. Making them is the church’s business. Don’t expect God to send your assembly the finished product; you must grow your own.

Our Lord selected twelve men. It was His intention that they (barring Judas) would be sent out to preach. But His first reason in calling them was: *“that they might be with Him”* (Mk. 3:14). So it should be with us. We must honestly convince young believers that we want to spend time with them. It will, of course, require a willingness to be transparent. Your stock will go up, not down, if you are honest.



## Following Christ Leads Others to Him

How would you like to see the kind of work that Paul and his co-workers saw done on their short visit to Thessalonica? It was absolutely spectacular! Scores were rescued in a matter of weeks from a stronghold of Satan!

Notice the two linked statements in Paul’s first letter to the young saints there: *“For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”* (1 Thess. 1:9). Here he recounts the remarkable turnaround in their lives. Does he give us a clue to the reason behind the campaign’s signal success? The answer is found in verse 5.

*“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake”* (1 Thess. 1:5). He explains that the Holy Spirit did this work, blasting these Thessalonians loose from the world’s bedrock by divine power. Yet His power remains unabated today. So was there something else?

Yes, Paul adds, *“assurance”*—convincing evidence to the

Thessalonians that the gospel was real—was seen in the lives of the men who declared it. They were the proof that the gospel was worth trying: *“what manner of men we were.”*

Paul’s “home assembly” at Antioch was the school where he learned how it was done. Barnabas took the young, newly converted Saul under his wing. Some were skeptical of the former persecutor and Barnabas had his work cut out for him, grooming the volatile young Benjamite. He was just the man for the job.


We can surmise that the Antioch assembly was a very good disciple’s school because *“the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”* (Acts 11:26). Christians? The word is the diminutive of Christ—little Christs, they were called. The resemblance between the One followed and the followers was so close that even the pagans noticed. It was there Paul learned the principle, *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1).

## Can’t Do Everything? Do Something

There may be some who can take a believer right through the process from disciple to disciple-maker. But if you feel inadequate for the whole process, help with a part. Is your ministry visiting a senior’s home? Then take a few young people along and show them how to speak—clearly, directly—to the old folks. Take them out for pizza on the way home and express thanks for their involvement.

Can you share some of the books from your library that you found helpful as a young believer? (You may lose a few in process; I hope you’ll get over it.) Or show them how to use a concordance? Or give them an opportunity to ask their questions. If you don’t know an answer, it’s better not to bluff—they’ll see through it. Just say, “Let’s get the books and look it up.” They will never forget it.

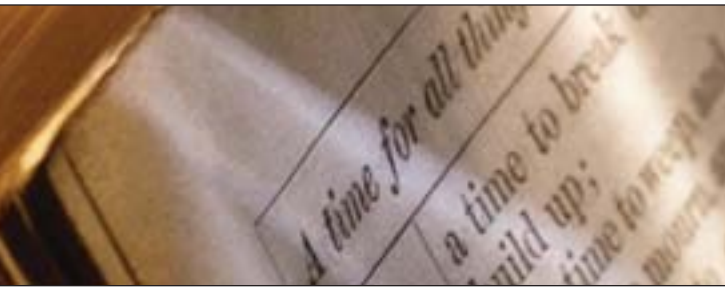
So when do we need to begin? It’s already late. There are scores of young Sauls looking for a Barnabas. First show them how you do it; then let them do it with you; then watch them as they do it (gentle correction mixed with a good dose of encouragement); then inspire them to find someone to teach. Only then is the cycle complete.

And then it’s time to start again with someone else! 

# ALL BIBLE STUDENTS

*Walking Bibles? Not any more. We need to go back to school.*

It was radical thinking when the brethren who met in Dublin and at Powerscourt discovered that the clergy-laity division which was taken as normative in Christendom was thoroughly unbiblical. And it is not unrelated that the standard Bible study helps—Wigram’s Lexicon, Vine’s Dictionary, Newberry’s Bible, Mackintosh’s Notes, and later commentaries written for a general readership—largely came from the pens of those called “Brethren.” It was because they believed that while not every Christian was a scholar, every Christian should be a student.



Publishing houses like John Ritchie, Pickering & Inglis, Loizeaux, and Marshall, Morgan & Scott flourished. Assembly writers dominated the evangelical market. As Harry Ironside said to Billy Graham, “Sooner or later, every Bible student must milk the Brethren cow.”

I believe Emmaus Correspondence School is still the world’s largest Bible correspondence school, though I suspect that far more of her students are behind bars in America than in assembly pews! And though William MacDonald’s *Believers Bible Commentary* might well be the most translated modern one-volume commentary in the world, the average assembly is doing well if it has one or two serious students of the Word. They are often women.

We have now reached a critical point. Assembly publishing in North America hangs by a thread. Public ministry often shows painful evidence of a lack of preparation or a lack of Bible study skills. Christians turn to parachurch groups for food supplements to keep from starving. How can we expect biblical churches if we are not biblical Christians? What can be done?

## Believing What God Has Promised

First, we must come to the amazing realization that God has made us all Bible students. You are to be a key

part of the solution! All believers are indwelt by the Spirit, the divine Inspirer of the Book. In fact John goes so far as to say, “*The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but...the same anointing teacheth you of all things...*” (1 Jn. 2:27).

To whom does He unfold the truth? Listen to the Lord Jesus: “*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*” (Lk. 10:21). Does it also seem good in *your* sight, brother, sister? Yes, He meant you.


## Freeing Up Time to Study

First, we must visit the altar of sacrifice. Serious Bible study requires a significant outlay of time and effort. What will we do less that we might study more? One brother in whose home I visited decried the sad state of his assembly, then took me into his bookless “study” to demonstrate his skills in video golf. I don’t wish to be hard, but it is fair to say that the “early brethren” were not remembered for their familiarity with the stars of stage and screen, their designer clothes, or their knowledge of the best gourmet restaurants. But they did know the Book and its Author.

Having freed up time, and having some basic tools at hand, we then need prayer for illumination, patience in reading the text of Scripture, and diligence in thinking through the passage. Many helps are available to us.

## Using What We Learn

Then, having gleaned from the Word, we need to find effective ways to give out what we have learned (not necessarily publicly). This helps us to understand it clearly, explain it accurately, to share its bounty, and to remember it, too. Could you meet with a young believer for lunch each week to talk over a passage you both have been studying? What could be more rewarding than discovering the very thoughts of God and, having seen the miracle of truth bring fruit in our own lives, commit these truths “...to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2)!

One other roadblock. Older believers, never shown how to study, feel sheepish about revealing their inexperience. Well, that’s just what to do. Be sheepish! Confess your eagerness (in spite of your lack of ability), and invite another sheep to graze with you. You won’t regret it. 

# WORKING WOMEN

*A key element in the work force of the New Testament Church.*



**P**eter, in his discussion of priesthood, never mentions either gender or gift (1 Pet. 2:5-10). Every believing woman is as fully a priest as any man. She has equal access to the Spirit and to the truth of the Word. She is welcome into the Holiest to worship, intercede or supplicate. Thank God for worshipping, studying and praying women!

The woman also has a key role in witness. As a royal priest, she goes forth to show forth the virtues of the One who called her out of darkness into light (2:9). In many countries, certainly in the Middle East, if unsaved women are to be reached personally with the gospel, Christian women must do it. A man witnessing to a woman could bring a charge of infidelity.

As well as her dual role in holy and royal priesthood, when a woman places her trust in Christ, she is given a gift to use for the glory of God as surely as every man. Are there certain off-limit gifts unavailable to women? The Bible does not say.



## Women Teachers?

I know some brothers (friends of mine) who insist that the woman is never to be in a formal teaching role, even with other women; is that what the Scripture teaches?

I understand the concern to maintain doctrinal purity in the local church; the elders should lay the doctrinal base for the assembly—and woe betide any who seek to undermine this foundation! Scripture could not be more solemn: *“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him”* (1 Cor. 3:17). Here the local church is in view and the words *“defile”* and *“destroy”* are the same Greek word.

The elders should teach all the saints so everyone can *“give a reason for the hope”* within them, explaining why they believe what they believe. Certainly Priscilla is seen actively engaged in discussing Bible doctrine in the home setting with her husband and Apollos. She would not have dominated the conversation, being an exemplary woman, no doubt marked by *“a gentle and quiet spirit”* (1 Pet. 3:4, NKJV). But the verse declares *“...When Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”* (Acts 18:26).

The argument against women holding Bible studies with other women goes like this. Almost all modern cults were started by women (true). One reason for the silence of women in public meetings is that Eve was deceived in the garden (true). The word used for *“teach”* in Titus 2:4 is *sophronizo*, not the common word for didactic teaching (true). Therefore the Lord intends women only to train by example, not by expounding the Word. Is that also true?

We should note that all doctrinal error mentioned in the NT is traced to men: Diotrephes, Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Philetus, to name a few. Only Jezebel (whomever or whatever she symbolizes) is linked with false teaching.

Secondly, it is true that the woman is to be protected (better than Adam did) and she should know she is especially vulnerable. But the application which Paul makes in that passage is also applied to men (2 Cor. 11:3). Surely we will not now restrict men from teaching!

The Greek word used is found only there in our Bible; I would not want to hang an issue on the meaning of that word. The word means *“teach to be serious”* and what better way than through Scripture? What other authority do sisters have to teach the younger women how to love their husbands and their children, to be chaste and modest, etc.? Especially since the object of the teaching is *“that the Word of God”* not be blasphemed!

## A Distinctive Role

It is common practice to tell the women what they *can't* do in the meetings of the church. And it is true that Scripture places one restriction on the woman in the assembly of the saints. She is not to speak as a representative (the word *“image”* in 1 Cor. 11). In enacting heaven's great love drama, the man is to play the part of Christ; the woman is given the part of the Church. It would be completely out of character, then, for the woman to teach the man in this setting. Would the Church dare tell Christ what to do?

Of course her silence is not as far as *God* is concerned. The woman is only silent to us. Her praise is heard with absolute clarity in the presence of the Lord. Yet the woman

is free to sing audibly and to say “Amen” at the conclusion of a prayer. Why? Because she is acting as an individual priest, not as a representative of either the men or of the Lord. And of course she has the high honor of being the steward of the coverings, acting as a guardian against any glories competing with the glory of God. Remember the man’s glory is placed under the woman’s covering, too.

Now why don’t we emphasize what the women *can* do from Scripture? The New Testament is full of examples.

1. Anna: Heroic widow, faithful worshipper, fearless testifier, and godly example of being “fruitful in old age.”

2. Mary: There are actually six Marys in the New Testament, each one a godly example. I keep them straight by linking them with their hometown: i) Mary of Nazareth, the mother of our Lord, “blessed among women,” who expresses one of the finest paeans of praise anywhere in Scripture (see the similarities with Hannah’s prayer in 1 Sam. 2); ii) Mary of Magdala, the woman who never got over being saved, who lingered at the tomb and received the commission from Christ to tell His “brethren” that He was alive; iii) Mary of Jerusalem, mother of John Mark, who opened her home for prayer meetings; iv) Mary of Bethany, one of Jesus’ dearest friends, the only one who let

Him finish the story of the cross uninterrupted, and therefore anointed Him *before* He died because she knew she might not have time after; v) Mary of Emmaus, wife of Cleopas, probably the one who constrained the Lord in to break bread; and vi) Mary of Rome, a “mother” to Paul, no doubt caring for him when he was there in the capital.

3. Dorcas: “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha...this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds” (Acts 9:36), making the gospel *winsome to win some*.

4. Phoebe: a sister in the family; a servant of the church; a saint, separated from the world; and a succourer (protectress) of many who were the disadvantaged in life.

5. Priscilla: always mentioned with her husband (3x P & A; 3x A & P); willing to lay down their necks for Paul; moved to see a new assembly started; worked with their hands to free up Paul; an assembly met in their home; she and her husband discreetly helped Apollos in the Word.

6. Euodias and Syntyche, Tryphena and Tryphosa and all the other “work-fellows” in the gospel.

There are many other examples of hospitality, giving, prayer, visiting, comforting, teaching younger women and children, good works, encouragement, and more! Carry on, dear sisters! We need you and thank God for you. 🕊

## PRAYER & FASTING

*The secret of their power was in knowing they didn’t have any!*



**T**his small section is not intended to bring before the Lord’s people the vital importance of prayer. I believe that the prayer life of many Christians (the writer included) as well as the prayer ministry of many assemblies could be greatly improved. But I think we know that. It is not a truth we have overlooked in the book of Acts. Every page of the history of the early Church is filled with the incense of the saints rising up to God.

It would seem that the *vitality* of our prayers would greatly increase if some of these other issues were resolved. For example, if “...a great door and effectual [was] opened unto [us], and there [were] many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9). Suddenly our prayers would have grip; we would again be *in* it, rather than watching from the sidelines.

Or if we were all in the Book again, up to our elbows in

rediscovered truth—what would *that* do to our contact with the Throne? Or if we expected the Spirit to guide us into a God-sized opportunity, I mean *ready* guide us, rather than our planning, and expecting Him to approve!

But what I think we may be missing is the *instancy* of NT praying. They didn’t say, as we sometimes do, “We should pray about that.” They went ahead and prayed at that very moment. We see the same in Nehemiah’s prayers, and Paul’s—he interrupts his own letter writing!

Then too, I think we’re missing the *constancy* of NT praying. That’s what fasting was all about, wasn’t it. Hold all calls. Forget lunch. And supper, if it came to that. Pray on. Pray through until the answer came to all, clear as a trumpet on the morning air. Sure as the voice of God.

Lord, teach us to pray...like that! 🕊

# HOSPITALITY

*Heaven's hospital, where love kisses away the hurts the doctor can't see.*



**W**hy, when I was a boy... I must be over 50; reminiscence comes easier all the time. Nonetheless it is true that the believers were often in one another's homes when I was young. Today we have little excuse. North American believers generally have substantial houses, and air conditioned cars to transport them in ease from one place to another. (My father used to say, "Solomon in all his glory was not conveyed in one of these!") We have freezers and microwaves, 12-piece settings of china and dish washers to finish the task (all this must provide strange reading for our brothers and sisters in India and Africa who receive the magazine). Yet for all this, we live increasingly lonely lives, isolated from one another.

Hymn sings around the piano in a believer's home have been replaced by entertainment centers that pump out the music for us. Preferably into insulated headphones. Are we the better for it? Hardly. It was during those times that we tuned our young voices, learned to sing in parts, enjoyed age-less fellowship, and increased our repertoire

(like *Redemption Songs*, with 1000 hymns and choruses!).

It was in each others' homes that we saw the Christians laugh—and weep. We saw past the Sunday smile and the starched shirts. We learned to sympathize with them, to appreciate them as real people. When you learn about their heart-aches and daily challenges, you can be a little more patient with their foibles. They became real friends and were not so easy to let go when assembly problems hit, as they will from time to time.

*"Ye know the house of Stephanas...that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints"* (1 Cor. 16:15). They might have had good reasons not to do it—short of time, tight on money, or they just liked their privacy—but they couldn't help themselves. They were addicted; they "set themselves" to do it, and wouldn't let anything stop them.

Three cheers for such households today. Will yours be one? You will have to *set yourselves* to do it. But in the end it will be the best thing you can do for your own family, and one of the best things you can do for His family, too.

# 2:42 FELLOWSHIP?


*Another meeting? Is that what we need? Just a suggestion.*



**H**ere's something to think about. We know that the early believers were involved in private Bible study, enjoyed personal fellowship in each others' homes, expressed individual worship throughout the week and prayed *"without ceasing."* Yet we believe that the words of Acts 2:42 have to do with their *corporate* life as a body of believers—at least three out of the four!

Here is the verse: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* If we believe that this verse is referring to public functions of the gathered church, why do we not have a fellowship meeting? And if we did, what would it be like?

Fellowship means sharing what we have in common.

There are personal challenges, victories, the Lord's acting on our behalf (getting us a job, giving an opportunity to a family member to witness, etc.) which would be inappropriate for the Lord's Supper (a time of *remembrance of the Lord*, more focused than general worship), and perhaps too time-consuming for a prayer meeting. But what an encouragement it could be for the saints to share such real-life dealings. How it would *"provoke [one another] unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24). Could it be abused? Could some dominate? Or fabricate? Of course. But we have all heard "horizontal prayers" or borne with inappropriate ministry or worship. Handled properly, I think it could be one of the most encouraging things we do! 

# THE SPIRIT LEADING

*Is this just for an hour on Sunday morning?*

It is a rare chapter in the book of Acts that does not prominently remind us of the strategic influence of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the Church. The early chapters emphasize the once-for-all baptism of the Spirit, a (partial) fulfillment of Joel 2 and of the promise of John the Baptist that the One coming after him would baptize, not in water, but in the Spirit (Acts 11:16). And so it happened.

This historic event led the disciples into a whole new way of life. The Spirit guided them into truth, directed their missionary efforts, and empowered their preaching. Of many we read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit—for example, Peter (4:8); Stephen (6:5) and his fellow deacons; and Paul (9:17). Not only so, but we read, *“When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were ALL filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness”* (4:31). Does this explain our lack of boldness in witnessing today?

The Spirit was an active agent in their gospel work. He directed them to the best fishing areas (see 8:29; 9:10). The Spirit also gave confirmation of the work (5:32). Paul would later write, *“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance”* (1 Thess. 1:5). Do we not sense that much of our Christian activity and ministry is of the *“word only”* variety? Where is this unction of which John wrote?

Who could deny that the events recorded in Acts would not have happened without the convicting, energizing, directing, encouraging ministry of the Spirit? He was key to the expansion of the Church.

Is this the dominant influence in assembly life today? Have we reacted so strongly against the false emphasis on the Spirit in the Charismatic movement that we rarely think of Him? Has the leading of the Spirit shrunk down to an hour or so on Sunday morn-

ing, directing worship at the Lord’s Supper? Are those who preach the Word evidently filled with the Spirit? Do elders fast and pray to seek the Spirit’s leading in sending out fresh forces to do exploits in the Great War (13:2)? Do those entrusted with the gospel spend serious time looking to the Spirit for guidance as to where we should work, and how we should be doing it?


I know it is possible to become overmuch righteous in the matter. Like the story of Harry Ironside.

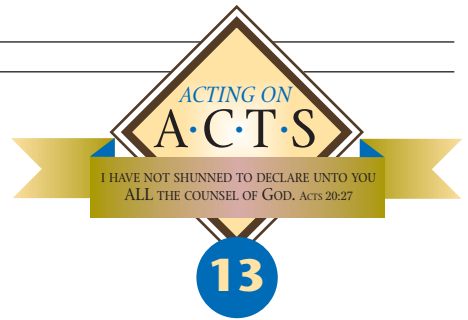
When a young man was asked if he would transport Dr. Ironside to a meeting, he replied that he would pray about it. “I don’t want that young man taking me,” Ironside replied. Why not?

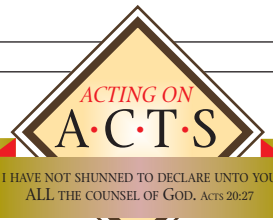
“He might find it’s the Lord’s will to take me and then decide it isn’t the Lord’s will to bring me back!”

Nonetheless I have become deeply concerned personally with the excessive scheduling of preachers, sometimes years in advance. If the Lord directed me to continue longer in one place, or to visit a needy area, it does little good to tell the Spirit, “I think I can fit that in late in 2006.”

There was a day when the Lord’s workers were directed by the Lord Himself. I’m not saying that the Lord can’t direct a group of elders to invite a minister of the Word to come to their assembly. I just wonder how much spiritual exercise goes into much of the filling of assembly preaching calendars. Have we become little more than a ministerial pulpit service?

Here is a vital area that may have, by slow erosion, changed from being Spirit-exercised to being man-organized. Would you pray with me about this? We need clearer direction in the work of God, so we can go through doors He opens instead of banging our heads against walls. We need to declare the gospel *“in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”* We need to give the Spirit His rightful place again. 





14

# COMMUNITY IMPACT

*The whole world knew they were there and what they were doing.*

**H**ow did these early believers make such an impact? By lives of holy separation, by good works linked with tireless gospel witness, by evident love for one another, and by strategic thinking.

Whole cities were stirred when the Christians arrived in town. They were talked about by the common people in the markets and in the mansions of the rich and famous. They were known in the prisons and the palaces. Slaves like Onesimus heard the gospel from their lips, but so did Caesar. Some mocked or persecuted them; some believed them; no one ignored them. Their accusers said, *“These that have turned the world upside down are come here also”* (Acts 17:6).

The believers had method in what they did. The evangelists went first to the big centers: Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome. Then, as Paul would write to the Thessalonians, *“From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad”* (1 Thess. 1:8). Of his stay in Ephesus, Luke observed, *“...all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks”* (Acts 19:10). By establishing bases at the crossroads, they would set up spheres of influence that spread into the interior.


We need to think about this in North America. At a time when millions are moving to the cities, many assemblies have shrunk or disappeared there as the Christians move to suburbia or into the countryside, looking for a better environment for their families. This isn't to be criticized, but who will reach the cities for Christ? In the last few years there have been new assemblies started in some major centers, but there are many others that need a committed band of fearless workers to take on cities just as wicked as—but substantially larger than—Corinth or Rome.

As Hitler contemplated his invasion of Poland, he

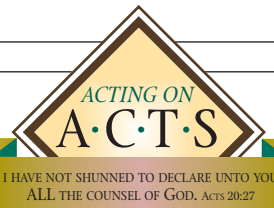
asked his generals with disdain, “Who would die for Danzig?” He greatly misjudged the resolve of the Allies; thousands gave their lives to stop him. But the question comes to us today. Would we give our lives for the cause of turning back the powers of darkness in San Francisco or Toronto, Miami or Vancouver, Phoenix or Detroit? Thank God for the Christians who *are* there! They need our prayerful concern and encouragement. But they need more. They need troops to help turn the tide. There are scores of mid-sized cities too, that need to be prayed for and wept over, and labored in while we still have time.

The apostles often went first to the monotheists where part of the work was already done. We should consider this. Instead of seeing mainline religions as a roadblock, acknowledge that they have taught some things right and start from there. Do they believe that Jesus is God? That men are sinners? Do they believe in heaven and want to go there? These are all wonderful starting points for witness.

If rejected by the synagogues, the apostles were willing to engage with the day's thinkers. Some object to Paul's approach at Mars' hill, saying that no assembly was founded there (as far as we know). But it should be noted on that occasion, *“certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them”* (Acts 17:34). That makes a minimum of five, probably several more. I would be quite encouraged if, on an unplanned stop in Boston, I was hauled in before the professors at Harvard (a comparable scenario) and saw that many saved!

Clear thinking, straight talking, holy living, hard working, sacrificial giving, practical caring—no wonder secular powers saw them as a threat and the common people heard them gladly. We want New Testament churches? *We need New Testament living.* 





# ELDERS' COMMITMENT

*This one almost slipped by me. I had to stop the presses to include it.*

15

Immediately I must explain the title. I am not joining with those who say much about inadequate elders, but do little to help them. As many *Uplook* readers have heard me say, there *are* perfect elders—unfortunately they are all in heaven. The ones that the Lord has given us will admit they are not perfect.

But the call to the sheep is not to criticize their elders; not even to *hear* an unsubstantiated charge against them (1 Tim. 5:19). Of course we are free to prayerfully “*entreat them as fathers*” (v. 1). We are to personally take the initiative to know them (1 Thess. 5:12); to honor them (1 Tim. 5:17); to “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls...*” (Heb. 13:17).

So this article is not about the need for elders to be committed generally. The need for that is clear to all believers, and any elders not as committed as they ought to be should already know that.

The particular commitment I wish to address is extremely rare, perhaps because it is so peculiar for an elder. It seems to be the very opposite of the elder’s natural inclination to care for the sheep. Elders, by definition, are inward-looking “*overseers*,” protective of the little flock entrusted to their care.

This commitment is a longing to see other assemblies born out of their own assembly as soon as feasible. No parent finds it easy to say good-bye to their children as they grow up and move out of the home. But that is the idea, isn’t it? Children should not be raised to be good children to us, but good parents to our grandchildren. And so with the local church.


Hear again Paul’s words to Timothy: “*The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim. 2:2). It is generally agreed that the first generation of faithful men were the elders he was commissioned to see raised up in every place. But who were the next generation of faithful men these elders were to equip? True, the elders are to teach the flock generally, but it seems Paul is speak-

ing about elders training another group of elders!

The commitment that every group of elders should have is this: *As soon as the Lord enables it, we want to see another assembly born out of this one. We are committed to this, not because we naturally feel like sending away some of these sheep we love and care about, but because we believe it is the pattern of the New Testament.*

I know what some elders are thinking. “We’re just barely hanging on! We can’t imagine letting some of our best people go to start another assembly!” Wait! I’m not saying this will happen tomorrow. But if the elders do not have this vision, others in the assembly will, and eventually little groups of shepherdless sheep will wander off to start something anyway—with or without the elders’ help. We see it all the time.

We believe that a Christian really starts to grow when he begins to think beyond himself. The same is true of assemblies. One of the best things that happened to the Greensboro, NC, assembly was the start of the Reidsville group. The same was true with Tulsa and Little Rock. And I for one would never have developed if the brethren in St. Catharines had not concluded that it was time to branch out—first into two, then three, then four, then five assemblies—because the young men didn’t have a chance. Someone was always stepping into the water before us; the elders didn’t want us lying by the pool for 38 years!

We want our good young men to be committed? To what? A token job? Tell an athlete, “You better get training for the Olympics—the 2048 Olympics.” Why bother? There’s lots of time. But if every group of elders was committed to the ideal that ASAP they wanted to see healthy, well-thought-out, balanced new groups carefully planted in soil that had already been tested by gospel effort, how would that affect the young men? Why, every group of elders would be eager to train them, hands-on, to get them ready for the next assembly to be started. And young men—I mean committed, serious, yes, “*faithful men*”—would catch a vision worth laying down their lives for. 



# USING OUR TIME & TALENTS

*It is a “use it or lose it” proposition.*

**James Martin**

It is always instructive to note likenesses between similar passages in the Bible. In Matthew 25 and Luke 19 we have two similar parables. In each parable a rich man, about to go on a journey, calls his servants to him and entrusts them with a part of his wealth, expecting them to invest it for him in his absence. In each parable the man returns and calls his servants to account for their stewardship. And from these two parables we learn lessons about the riches our Master has entrusted to us in His absence, and the account we will one day give of our stewardship.

It is sometimes even more interesting to notice the differences. And in these two parables there is a significant difference that ought not to be overlooked. In Matthew 25 the servants are entrusted with differing amounts of talents: five, two, and one. But in Luke 19 each servant is given the same amount to invest: one pound each.

Although we can rightly apply these two parables to different kinds of stewardship, let's think about how each one applies to our stewardship of time. For time is a kind of wealth. We even speak of time in terms of money: making time, saving time, spending time, investing time, redeeming time. Time is a precious resource which the Lord has entrusted to us that we may use it for Him. How we spend it reveals what is most important to us.

## The Parable of the Talents: Differing Riches

After returning from an evening of witnessing, a friend asked D. L. Moody about that evening's occurrences. Moody replied, “Praise God. There were three-and-a-half conversions tonight.”

“Three-and-a-half?” his friend inquired, perplexed, “You must mean three adults and one child.”

Mr. Moody replied, “No. Three children and one adult. For the one adult only has half his life left to give, but the

children have their whole lives ahead of them.”

Obviously some of us have been given more years with which to serve the Lord. And the Lord expects us to make the most of whatever time He has granted to us.

We notice in the parable that the servant entrusted with the five talents invested them and earned five more talents for his master. The servant entrusted with the two talents only earned two more talents. And yet both of those servants were given the same reward—word for word. From this we learn two things.

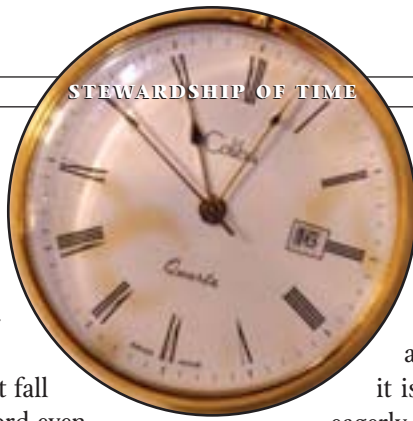
First, this teaches us that the Lord is just. The servant entrusted with two talents was not expected to earn five. The Lord does not expect that a believer who is saved later in life will be able to accomplish as much as a believer saved as a child and had 70 years in which to serve Him. Provided that we faithfully use whatever years the Lord has given us, His evaluation of us will righteously and graciously account for the difference in our opportunities given.

But justice cuts both ways, and so we notice secondly that the servant entrusted with five talents was not expected to earn only two. The Lord expects a return on every talent—every year, every month, every day. And so if we are privileged to have been saved early in life, we cannot expect the Lord to be pleased if we fritter away our early years. This is a challenge to all of us, but the younger we are, the greater the challenge.

We live in a time when low standards—even regarding service for the Saviour—mean that virtually little is expected of young people. If a young believer manages to reach marriage having been somewhat regular in attendance at meetings while simultaneously avoiding gross immorality, they are considered a successful Christian. No fruit is required. No investment for the Master is needed.

Surely the parable of the talents teaches us otherwise! The Lord does not save children or young people so that they can give Him a couple of hours a week and spend the rest of their time in a manner indistinguishable from a

**You can't  
kill time  
without  
injuring  
eternity.**



moral unbeliever. The Lord saves children and young people so that they might be rescued not only from spiritual death but also from a wasted life. He came that we might have life more abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

Are you a young believer? Then don't fall into the trap of planning to serve the Lord eventually. Serve Him today! This will be costly, as the Enemy will oppose you with all of the discouragements and temptations that he can muster. It will mean foregoing many of the social activities that most other Christian young people (even your friends) partake in. Not because those activities are evil, but simply because devoting countless hours to recreation will leave you with little time left to serve the Lord. It will mean working, praying, and studying while other Christians are resting and playing. It will mean risking embarrassment and attempting tasks that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable, while others stay in their comfort zone. But our Lord Jesus will abundantly reward such sacrifice and service—not just in eternity, but in the joy of a life of purpose now.

### The Parable of the Pounds: Equal Riches

The second parable reminds us that there are some riches the Lord gives to believers in identical amounts. We see this when we think of time in hours instead of years. Each believer may have a different number of days and months and years with which to serve the Lord, but we all have exactly the same number of hours each day.

In this parable we see that although each servant was given one pound, some did more with that one pound than others. And isn't that true of our days? This week the Lord will give every one of us 168 hours. And yet some Christians will accomplish a great deal for the Lord with them, while others will accomplish very little.

Do you want a good way to forecast how much you will accomplish for Christ in the next week? Consider how much you accomplished for Him last week. And the week before. It is fine to have good intentions about the week ahead. But we probably had those same good intentions a week ago. What did they amount to? Unless we take definite steps, it is unlikely that this week's good intentions will yield more results than last week's. Using our time wisely will not happen by accident. We must discipline ourselves daily to spend our time serving the Saviour.

Now, we must be careful when we speak of assessing what was accomplished for the Lord in any given time. We

don't mean what people think we accomplished, for much Christian service occurs in private. So this is not an invitation to evaluate the service of others. Rather it is a challenge to humbly and honestly consider before the Lord how it is that we are spending our days. Are we eagerly, diligently, purposefully serving Him? Or have we been distracted by the busyness of daily life and the "harmless" pleasures the world offers in abundance?


### One Last Likeness

This brings us to one last similarity between the parables. In each parable there was a servant who squandered his stewardship. And in each parable the Lord had very direct words for such a servant.

Sadly it is possible for a Christian to waste both types of time which the Lord grants us: the hours and the years. The Enemy has a massive arsenal of time-wasters and is happy to custom-design another one for us if none of the common ones tempt us. It's no good congratulating ourselves on all the ways in which we *don't* waste time, especially if the only reason we don't indulge in those actions is that they don't appeal to us. What we need to do if we are to grow as Christians is to identify the specific ways in which we personally waste time, commit those to the Lord, and take steps to eliminate them.

Wasting time isn't necessarily intentional. In fact, a Christian can spend his entire Christian life intending to serve the Lord...tomorrow. But that's another thing about time; there always seems to be another tomorrow. And so devotion and service can be postponed an entire lifetime, one day at a time.

The day is coming, however, when we will step out of time, where there are no more tomorrows. Our last opportunity to serve Him this side of glory will pass away. The Bible calls it simply "*the time*." We are to spend our days laying up treasures for "*the time*" (1 Tim. 6:19). We are to watch and pray for we do not know when "*the time*" is (Mk. 13:33). We are to pass no final judgments before "*the time*," for it is then that the Lord will bring to light the hidden things and manifest the counsels of our hearts (1 Cor. 4:5).

No one will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and wish they'd spent more time watching TV. In truth we already know which activities we will one day wish we had spent our time on. So why not start now? Why not invest today and every day, this hour and every hour, for our Master. He is coming back from His journey soon. 

# CHRISTIAN GIVING

*A beloved servant links Christ's giving and ours.*

*Excerpted from the author's commentary on 2 Corinthians, pp. 205-214.*

**H. A. Ironside**

In 2 Corinthians 9, the Spirit of God brings before us in a very impressive manner our responsibility to give of our means both for the support of the Lord's work and in order to meet the necessities of Christians who are in distressing circumstances.

Our Lord enjoyed in a peculiarly rich way the happiness of giving. He through whom all things came into being, and for whom they all exist, came into this lower part of His creation *"not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."* Paul, addressing the Ephesian elders, calls on them to *"remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

Under what circumstances did He so speak? At first one is surprised to find that the four Gospels are searched in vain to locate any such expression. In other words, the inspired records of the life and sayings of our blessed Lord do not tell us that He used these words on any occasion. Yet the apostle quotes them as though they were well known, as undoubtedly they were, and had frequently been used by the Saviour. In fact the tense of the original suggests frequent repetition. Wherever His disciples went—those who had known Him on earth—they carried with them this little bit of personal recollection; and so the story went everywhere in the early Church.

What light this throws on His character, and how it emphasizes the deep-toned joy He found in imparting good to others. *"More blessed"* is really *"happier;"* so that we are justified in reading, *"It is happier to give than to receive."* He never gave grudgingly. To Him it was a joy to share with those in need. He delighted in communicating the riches of His grace to poverty-stricken, bankrupt souls. Doubtless, often as He fed the multitudes, healed the sick, or ministered in some other way to human need, He would turn to



the disciples and say quietly and with a sense of deep satisfaction, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

The Holy Spirit wants us to take His example and His words to heart. We are naturally so self-centered that we are inclined to believe the greatest happiness is found in receiving rather than in giving. We all enjoy receiving gifts. We delight in receiving praise and love. We sometimes imagine that if everything that our hearts crave could be poured out on us, we would be supremely happy. But this is a total mistake.

The happiest people in the world are those who give most unselfishly; and herein lies the challenge to Christians everywhere to whom God has entrusted the means of furthering His interests in the world by financial gifts. Those who go forth for the name's sake of the Lord Jesus, leaving home and loved ones, leaving too all opportunity of earning a livelihood and accumulating wealth, should be in a very special way objects of interest to those who would enjoy the blessedness of which the Lord Jesus speaks.

In the third Epistle of John, we note the commendation of the aged apostle to the elder Gaius. He writes, *"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for His name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth"* (3 Jn. 5-8). Undoubtedly the reference was primarily to travelling preachers of the gospel. Unable to provide for themselves, they were cast on the Lord, and He on His part met their needs through the gracious

gifts of faithful Christians in the home churches, who found real joy in this delightful fellowship.

To what extent we have entered into the mind of Christ in regard to this gracious ministry? Are we also experiencing the joy that comes through giving as enabled by God, in order that His servants may be maintained in the path of usefulness?

Notice how earnestly Paul stresses the importance of this ministry of giving. He says in 2 Corinthians 9:1-2: *"For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many."* A year before they had pledged themselves to give for this fund that Paul was raising, and now he is asking them to fulfil the pledges. *"Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting."*

He had gone throughout the churches of Macedonia urging them to have part in this bounty for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and he told them that those in Corinth had already pledged to do something generous, but there had been no cash. Now he was coming through on his way to Jerusalem and he did not want them to make him ashamed. He did not wish to beg them to fulfil their promise, but he desired to show the Macedonian brethren how prompt they were to give. *"Therefore,"* he says, *"I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness."*

The word for *"covetousness"* might just as truly be translated *"extortion."* He would have the visiting brethren gather this sum when they reached Corinth so that it might not seem as if he had to come to them as a tax collector, trying to force them to give what they had promised. He wanted it to be glad, joyous giving, the kind that would glorify the Lord.

And so he uses a common truism to illustrate a great spiritual reality. *"He which soweth sparingly shall*

*reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."*

If we want God's blessing on our work, if we want Him to visit us with power and to be generous with us, we must care for the needs of others. We make a great mistake in talking about home missions and foreign missions. This world is a foreign land to which our blessed Lord came, and He sends us forth to carry this gospel to the ends of the earth. We want to multiply our efforts a thousand-fold by backing up those who go into the regions beyond. Paul, of course, was referring especially to caring for the poor, but the same principle applies to both.

Now notice the state of the heart that God takes into account when it comes to giving. *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart."* Someone says he does not believe in making a pledge. What is a pledge? It is the expression of the purpose of your heart. The apostle says, writing by the Spirit of God, *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give."* Purpose in your heart, then give; *"not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."*

You say, "They will think it strange if I do not give anything. So I suppose I had better give a little." Do not give so—*"not grudgingly."* He does not want one penny from you if you had rather keep it yourself. God does not want it if you give it grudgingly.

"Well," you say, "I think I ought to give. I suppose God holds me responsible and I will have to give." No, no; *"not of necessity."* God gave freely, gladly. And He does not want anything from you unless you also give willingly and gladly; unless you are thankful to be able to give. *"For God loveth a cheerful giver."*

The word in the Greek is *hilaron*, and may be translated *"hilarious."* God loves a hilarious giver. Not a giver who says, "Dear me, they are always needing money," but one who says, "What is that? Another opportunity to give to missions! Another chance to help the needy! Well, bless the Lord! What can I give? Yes, I think I can double that." That is a cheerful giver.


And the Lord will never be your debtor if you give like that. *"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."* You see, you take the

right attitude toward God and His Word and He will take a wonderfully benevolent attitude toward you.

Then Paul quotes from Psalm 112, "He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness remaineth forever." In that psalm God is depicting the righteous man. One characteristic is, he is interested in other people. He disperses abroad. He gives to the poor. Righteousness means consistency with the relationship in which we stand. Now, how can we act consistently if we are neglectful of our attitude toward the needy and toward the servants of Christ?

"Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness." God knows you need these things and He will look after you.

Righteousness and liberality always go together.

"Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God." It begins with God and ends with God. God is able to make all grace abound toward you as you give of your substance to Him. You give to sustain His servants in His fields. They are blessed and return thanks to God, and that blessing comes back to you. All the rivers run into the sea; the moisture is caught up from the sea into the clouds; the water comes down on the land from the clouds, and the rivers carry it to the sea again, and so there is a never-failing circle of blessing. 

## SPECIAL ISSUE

# SACRIFICIAL LIVING

*True Christianity is so radical it puts die-hard Communists to shame. I've seen it in China, and it made me wonder, If that's Christianity, what are we playing at?*



There is a widely repeated view (even by those who claim to closely adhere to the New Testament pattern for the Church) that the spirit of sharing seen in New Testament days is not something to be practiced by us now. We like to quote Acts 2:42, but seldom read on to verse 44, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common." But in case we missed it the first time, the Spirit of God feels it important enough to insert it again, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (4:32). Verse 33 begins with "And." It links this practical fellowship of possessions in verse 32 with the "great power" and "great grace" evident among the believers. Hmmm!

Let's get it straight. On one side of the issue, none of our money, time, energy or ability belongs to us. It is all a gift from God and a stewardship for God. But on the other hand, God recognizes the right to personal property. We see these two sides in Acts 5.

Speaking of his land, Peter said to Ananias, "While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" (5:4). Yes, it was.

**They knew Christianity was costly.** Communism says, "What's yours is mine." But Christianity says, "What's mine is yours." Communism is coerced; Christianity is voluntary. But the early believers (and those in the so-called early "Brethren movement," too) happily relinquished their goods for the Great Cause. They expected Christianity to be costly because they saw its value. They "took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods" knowing that they had "in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34).

**They thought Christ was worth it.** The Lord Jesus sold all that He had, too (Mt. 13:46). For our sakes He became poor. What has God withheld from sharing with us? The world may be generous; we are called to be sacrificial. Just like Jesus.



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# CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED

*An excellent evangelistic Bible study guide!* (Eric Kalmbach, Markham Bible Chapel)

**Eric Kalmbach** [ekalmbach@generationpv.com](mailto:ekalmbach@generationpv.com)

He is available to respond to any inquiries

Jesus insisted that children be given access to Him. “*Permit the little children to come unto Me, and do not forbid them,*” He said. Somewhat confused, the disciples stepped back and gave way to these seemingly unimportant little people. Jesus picked one of them up, held the child in His arms and blessed it. The year was around AD 32.

It is now AD 2004 and children regularly gather with Sunday School teachers, AWANA leaders or camp counsellors to hear exciting stories from the Bible about this same Jesus who loves them. Many respond to the invitation of the Saviour and personally receive the Lord Jesus.

This has been the happy experience of the believers at Markham Bible Chapel. In general, outreaches to children tend to be interesting, relevant and enjoyable. The reason is simple. If children find things boring or irrelevant they let you know or simply stop attending.

Adults are more sophisticated, have more preconceived opinions. They also have fine-tuned rejection strategies:

- Church is boring. Everyone knows that, so instead I’ll just stay home and watch my lawn grow.
- I personally don’t need religion, but a little bit wouldn’t hurt my kids. It might round out their education.
- I have my own church; I don’t need another one.

Many parents are interested in providing their children with an interesting learning experience with a bit of religious training included. Most will attend “Parent’s Night” or other special occasions where their children are participating. Cameras often record these “award winning” performances. Even though friendly relationships developed with parents over a cup of coffee or during drop-off or pick-up times, there was a reluctance to attend regular assembly meetings. Parents weren’t interested in “joining a church.” Many already were members of other religious denominations and “didn’t see any reason to change.”

The desire to communicate the gospel message to parents and other adults presented a real challenge. The traditional gospel meeting may still be effective in some places. However, when a serious effort of prayer and handing out invitations from door to door fails to move people,

it’s time to re-evaluate the approach.

During our search for a good way to communicate the good news of the Lord Jesus to adults, we had a visit from an evangelist who shared the encouraging experience of seeing a good number of people come to faith in Christ through meetings in his home. He explained how he invited people for supper followed by a talk about a relevant topic and how the Bible addresses the issue. After concluding the study, people were free to continue with questions as they wished. Many did, and some accepted the Lord.

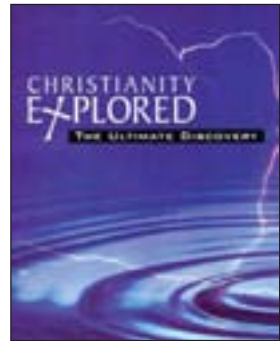
While looking for an appropriate study guide, we evaluated the popular ALPHA program. Not finding it suitable, we were subsequently pleased to discover the *Christianity Explored* (CE) course. It is a straight-forward study of the Gospel of Mark, where people are encouraged to read and examine the Bible for themselves. Over 10 weeks, three questions are posed and answered from the Bible. (1) Who is Jesus? (2) Why did He come? (3) What does He demand of those who want to follow Him? Throughout Mark’s Gospel these three themes of His Identity, His Mission and His Call are repeated. A quote from the CE literature, “*The emphasis on God’s grace (that we are more wicked than we ever realized, but more loved than we ever dreamed) and also the clear presentation of the cost involved in following Christ make the course distinctive.*” is certainly true.

During the first study, a total of 12 guests joined the study with 8-10 attending on a regular basis. We initially only invited people we knew: parents of children attending youth events, neighbors, and friends. There were no cold-calls or mass mailings to strangers.

The format is designed to create a relaxed atmosphere where people can open up and ask questions.

## Outline of the evening

6:30-7:00	Leaders prayer time
7:00-7:45	Dinner
7:45-8:05	Discussion #1 (Read Bible passage, answer questions in <i>Study Guide</i> )
8:05-8:30	Gospel presentation (on video or in person)
8:30-9:00	Discussion # 2 (challenge to respond)



Dinner is provided at 7 PM for all in attendance, followed by Discussion #1 which involves reading a Scripture passage, then answering 4–6 questions for 20 minutes. The next session is viewing a half-hour video presentation by Rico Tice (a co-author of the study) where important biblical truths are explained in a contemporary way.

Discussion #2 then provides an opportunity to respond to the message, answer questions and highlight key points. The evening is concluded at 9 PM. People are then free to leave or stay and discuss. The evening usually ends anywhere between 9:30 and midnight.

A weekend retreat is recommended around Week 6 or 7 to provide a time away where guests can focus without distraction on what they have learned about the Lord Jesus to date, as well as understand what God has provided for those who receive Christ as Saviour, including the Church, Prayer, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. The first person to receive Christ did so in November, followed by two more at the retreat weekend in January of 2004.

On January 19, the second study commenced with good interest by both new and former attendees. Around 35 people have been contacted and relationships established. On the third week, one young woman announced that during the week she had been saved. There are several who are seriously interested in knowing more about the gospel and often stay to talk an hour or more after the studies are officially concluded at 9 PM.

### **An Evaluation of the Materials**

CE materials include; (a) a *Study Guide for Guests*, (b) a *Leader's Study Guide*, which includes answers to the questions and background information on the Bible passage, (c) a *Guide on How to Run the CE Course*, (d) a paperback book presenting the gospel message, written by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, authors of the course. In addition, some promotional materials are available. The *Christianity Explored* study was developed over 10 years by those involved in evangelism at All Souls Church in London.

The study materials are excellent. The key elements of the gospel are clearly presented with due emphasis on our sinful condition, the deity of Christ, His atoning sacrifice and the need for personal appropriation. The cost of following Christ is highlighted and we are warned not to “lower the cost” in our presentation of the gospel simply to attract followers.

Several who have used a different study course have expressed concerns about its teaching on the Holy Spirit and because of this they skipped sections. CE can be used

with complete confidence since it faithfully follows the Scriptures and does not attempt to “soft pedal” the message to make it more appealing. It is simply a tool which can be used to present the gospel.

At a recent CE conference in Toronto, the presenters commenced the session by saying, “The emphasis tonight is not upon *Christianity Explored*; it’s about presenting the good news about Jesus as recorded in Mark’s Gospel.” This is an important differentiation between the different study materials available.

### **The Response**

One guest, a lady who had attended a large denominational church faithfully all her life, became quite agitated and demanded to know why she had never heard the gospel clearly explained until now. She found it inconceivable that church leaders who have studied religion for years never spoke about it. “For 41 years I didn’t realize that you needed “personal faith” in Jesus Christ, instead of just having a “general faith.” On November 17, 2003 she placed her “personal faith” in the Lord Jesus and experienced God’s salvation.

It has been a real joy and encouragement to those involved in the study to hear six people profess faith in Christ during the past seven months. I’m quite sure there was rejoicing in heaven as well. An older sister in the assembly told me, “You don’t know what an encouragement and blessing it is to me, to be able to minister to a new believer,” a young mother of four. The tears in her eyes confirmed her sincerity.

So, is the gospel message irrelevant, boring or simply untrue? Irrelevant? It’s an all too common charge by those who don’t know the Saviour. But is it the message, or the messengers? Are we irrelevant—unable to connect with our culture? Possibly. Boring? Are we boring people in our presentation of this glorious message?

The content of the message is unchangeable; however the methods employed in delivering the message may vary. Too often we get stuck in a rut and continue to do the same thing even though we see no fruit. The exciting thing about the gospel is that it is highly portable. You can take it anywhere and to anyone, under any conditions. It’s important that we understand our current culture and discover interesting and compelling ways to present it.

*We are holding an evangelistic training session in September 2004 for a number interested in conducting a study of this type. Our next CE session will commence in late September and run for 10 weeks.*



## 8120 AND 1

### *A Prayer and a Plea*

**O** LORD of the Harvest, hear our cry;  
The need seems too great, the souls too many,  
Those lost and dying souls who need the Seed  
implanted in their hearts.

We feel Elijah-like sometimes,  
(that is, before he heard about the other 7000!).

Eleven men? Was this how it began?  
No, it was one hundred twenty who were called upon—  
to wait.

To wait and see what God would do.

And so it happened right before their eyes:  
About three thousand,  
Then about five thousand more!  
And One—that blessed One  
who would, of course, make all the difference.

O LORD, are there 8000 yet,  
True hearts, hearts undistracted by the Dream?  
Willing to give it up—all for the Cause of Christ?  
LORD, let me be one, then, who volunteers  
without reserve, without retreat, without regrets.

And let us all—8000 strong (strong only in Thy might)  
Rise like a mighty army once again  
To live or die, but do it as we storm the ramparts  
of the Rebel-king  
To spoil his goods and take back captives who belong to Thee.