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Building Fruitful Ministry

So you want to be a minister? Actually, we can agree that this occupation begins with a calling more than a desire. Most individuals who engage this life journey find the road ahead is not exactly as they had anticipated. The image of power in the pulpit is only a small portion of the vast array of expectations awaiting those whom God has called. Even after completing the standard training for ministerial life, few discover themselves truly prepared for what is ahead.

Relationships and Ethics in Ministry offers the student a journey through the diverse challenges facing the modern minister. While no text can fully prepare us for the work of ministry, this course will explore numerous topics—from the pastor’s emotional and personal journey to managing church dynamics and community relations—that will help the minister understand some of the expectations that await him or her. After completing this course, the student will presumably be better equipped for the requirements each presents. Ultimately, success will be measured by the fruit that is borne out in faithfulness.

Course Objectives

¹ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 3–4.

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to

1. Identify the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual effects that relationships bring to the life of the minister.
2. Describe the priorities of conduct that can lead to effective relationships both at home and within the church.
3. Identify boundaries that help the minister maintain healthy relationships and avoid destructive choices that can undermine his or her ministry.
4. Define practical principles for pulpit ministry.
5. Explain the process of forgiveness and why it is essential to healthy ministry.
6. Define a minister's accountabilities and how each contributes to healthy ministry.
7. Explain the biblical role for the minister in regarding interaction with the community.
8. Describe effective approaches to evangelism and how to avoid creating barriers between unsaved family members and the gospel.
9. Identify ways for the local church to respond in the midst of community hardship.
10. Define personal integrity and explain how it can be maintained effectively.
11. Describe the difficulties of persevering in ministry and the components of a foundation that can lead to long-term endurance.

Unit 1 Relationships and the Minister

“Imagine a person who lives well, treating others fairly, keeping good relationships” (Ezekiel 18:5, *The Message Bible*). People want relationships that will bring fulfillment and happiness. Humans cannot thrive in isolation. Relationships are part of God's original design for humanity. In Genesis 2:18, the Lord said, “ ‘It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ ” Theologically and socially, in this longing for belonging, we experience relationships that are healthy. But relationships can also be fragile and filled with incredible pain, leaving us feeling desperate and broken.

For those in pastoral ministry and church leadership positions, the importance of relationships cannot be exaggerated. Paul brings this into perspective in his letter to Titus (1:7–9). It is a well-known challenge. We can get a fresh perspective by reading this passage from *The Message Bible*: “It's important that a church leader, responsible for the affairs in God's house, be looked up to— not pushy, not short-tempered, not a drunk, not a bully, not money-hungry. He must welcome people, be helpful, wise, fair, reverent, have a good grip on himself, and have a good grip on the Message, knowing how to use the truth to either spur people on in the knowledge or stop them in their tracks if they oppose it.”

It is also clear from Paul's instructions to Timothy that our personal lives are the basis of our ministry: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). We must be careful and not take this admonition lightly. Persevere; keep on keeping on. Do not stop. We should remember to rest physically, but we must not take a break in being on guard as we live our Christian example.

Unit 1 on the dynamics of pastoral relationships serves as the essential foundation for this course. Without it, the remainder of the course would have little value. The cost of a pastor's neglect in relationships is both personal and public.

Chapter 1 Personal Relationships

Lessons

- C1.1 How Relationships Affect Our Lives
- C1.2 Maintaining the Minister's Personal Relationships

Chapter 2 The Minister's Foundation for Relationship

Lessons

- C2.1 Foundations for Relationships from Matthew
- C2.2 Foundations for Conduct from Romans
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- C3.1 Secrets for Building a Strong Marriage
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Chapter 4 Relationships and Differences

Lessons

- C4.1 Human Beings Designed for Relationship
- C4.2 Healthy Relationships and Respect
- C4.3 Boundaries that Protect
- C4.4 Different or Disagreeable

Chapter 1 Personal Relationships

Personal relationships pose perhaps the greatest challenges and stresses. When relationships are in turmoil, nothing in our world seems quite right. Relationships require enormous amounts of energy, and their demand of emotional strength is likely off the charts. Yet, for all the hassles and hardships they bring before us, few would ever consider living without them.

For the minister, relationships pose a very important challenge. The ministry is a *people business*. The work of ministry is defined by the needs of individuals, and the focus of ministry effort is upon the good that God desires among the people He has created. The life of ministry centers on people. Though some ministers might feel more comfortable amidst the books within their libraries, the real work of ministry is among the people God has called them to serve.

For this dominant reason, ministers must become experts in relationships. They must not only succeed in navigating the challenging waters of their own relationships as individuals, but must also equip themselves to be called upon for aiding others in their relationships. The very nature of the work will place ministers in the midst of marital disputes, parental challenges, and leadership conflicts. If they cannot manage these difficulties well, their ministry work will be short-lived, regardless of the quality of their preaching.

To succeed, ministers must understand relationships, know them in their priority, and give their very best to their own relationships, for those relationships will provide ministers with the required strength to contribute to the needs of others. This chapter will explore the key relationships of a minister's life and the principles that will give him or her success in managing them. Along the way we will discover the far-reaching impact relationships will have on the minister's total well-being.

Lesson 1.1 How Relationships Affect Our Lives

Objectives

- 1.1.1 *Indicate how relationships affect us physically, emotionally, and socially.*
- 1.1.2 *Explain how relationships affect our spiritual health.*

Lesson 1.2 Maintaining the Minister's Personal Relationships

Objectives

- 1.2.1 *Write a personal statement of commitment to two habits that are priorities for your personal ministry life.*
- 1.2.2 *Defend and apply the truth that personal study of God's Word is a priority.*

Lesson 1.1 How Relationships Affect Our Lives

We cannot live in isolation, apart from the realities of personal relationships. You are known! And no matter how hard you may try to mask who you are, your soul will reveal the real you to the world sooner or later.

One example of this is a conversation that my wife Judy had with a woman at a retreat. The woman had listened to Judy's stories about a person named "Miss Evelyn." Following one session she approached Judy, saying, "My husband and I lived in Columbus, Georgia, for awhile and we bought our groceries at D and R Grocery for only one reason." Judy interrupted her with "Don't tell me, let me tell you and see if I am right. Miss Evelyn?" The woman was wide-eyed and beaming, "You're right! Miss Evelyn was the best. She always knew us and made us feel like we were the most important people in the world. We went to that grocery because Miss Evelyn was there."

I know that story is true because from the first grade through high school, I also worked at the D and R Grocery. Miss Evelyn is my mother. You can never get away from relationships. They are the foundation stones for a life-giving support system. This is a simple fact built into the world system: You will reap what you sow.

The Physical Effect

Indicate how relationships affect us physically, emotionally, and socially.

We have probably heard or made statements like, "He is a real pain in the neck!" or "She makes me sick to my stomach." These may sound harsh, yet they capture the very real aspect of the physical effects of strained interpersonal relations. We are all aware of the physical effects of stress and interpersonal tensions. They are exhaustion, tense muscles, headaches, and a variety of other biological reactions. The negative physical effects increase when tensions are denied and kept hidden. When we try to hide our emotions or interpersonal tensions, our stomachs seem to get our attention.

Of the five benefits people can experience in relationships, identify the one that seems most important for you.

Positively speaking, interpersonal relationships provide an emotional climate where people can (1) express themselves without self-consciousness, (2) feel a sense of belonging, (3) receive nurture, (4) gain affirmation and guidance, and (5) access new relationships and information. These benefits of interpersonal relationships positively influence our *physical* health by supplying information, a caring environment, group identity, a buffer to stress, and a purpose for living a healthy lifestyle (*Healthy Relationships* n.d.)

Since relationships can provide a buffer to stress, why might a conflict within an important relationship actually multiply the impact of stress on the individuals involved?

One of the most thorough research projects completed on relationships was the Alameda County Study. Headed by a Harvard social scientist, the study tracked the lives of seven thousand people over nine years. Researchers found that the most isolated people were three times more likely to die early than those with strong relational connections.

People who continued bad health habits (smoking, poor eating habits, obesity, or alcohol use) but had strong social ties lived significantly longer than people who had great health habits but lived isolated lives. In other words, it is better to eat cookies with good friends than to eat vegetables alone. Harvard researcher Robert Putnam notes that if you do not belong to any group but decide to join one, “you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half” (Ortberg 2003).

The Emotional Impact

Relationships are a key factor to psychological or emotional health. Richard Dayringer writes, “Emotional difficulties are usually rooted in problems in interpersonal relationships. Conversely, people are mentally healthy to the extent to which they are aware of and able to handle their interpersonal relationships” (1998, 7).

When human relationships go awry, an individual’s emotional response can vary extensively, all the way from uncooperative behavior to murder, as Americans have witnessed in recent years in horrific school shootings. But in addition to public crimes, poor interpersonal skills can also foment depression, anger, resentment, cynicism, and manipulative behavior. When troubled people feel threatened or frustrated with their relationship skills, they cannot think clearly and are more prone to say and do things that they later regret.

How should a pastor cope with his or her own unexpected responses when counseling others?

It is vital for pastors to monitor their own experiences and personal feelings when it comes to relating to people of all kinds who bring a host of concerns to the counseling session. As people seek pastoral care during moments of tremendous pain and deep personal needs, various and unexpected emotional responses can be triggered in the pastor personally, and these responses need to be resolved. We should find another peer or a godly professional to help us work through the emotion, rather than suppress it to fester and reappear later.

In the front matter of his book, *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore lists the complaints of our time as “emptiness, meaninglessness, vague depression, and disillusionment about marriage, family and relationships, a loss of values, yearning for personal fulfillment, and a hunger for spirituality.” These are the troubles people bring to their pastors in counseling sessions. Moore explains, “All of these symptoms reflect a loss of soul and let us know what the soul craves” (Moore 1992, xvi).

Larry Crabb (1987) challenges pastors with a reminder of the value of handling their own emotions in their encounters with others. Again, outside counsel can help. Trying to fill the void with activity, even religious, will not be enough, as Crabb notes:

Even when painful emotions are less overwhelming but still nagging, the usual remedies of getting busy or going out for a good time don't always work. More “spiritual” solutions such as spending increased time in the Word, longer periods in prayer, or stepped-up involvement in church activities sometimes do little more than pushing the troubling emotions to a back corner in our awareness—temporarily. (1987, 172)

The Social Dynamic

Describe a conflict you have observed within the church, and explain how that conflict affected those involved.

The social effect of interpersonal stress can bring about various responses, including verbal aggression, violence, withdrawal from others, and the breakdown of relationships. One author brings our focus on this aspect in several situations: when business associates terminate their partnership abruptly, when an upset family suddenly stomps out of the church, when an employee

quits without notice, when a couple decides to separate, or even when two nations go to war over a minor issue.

By nature, relationships are social. People relate to other people and so impact them positively or negatively. The minister must learn to handle relationship challenges with grace and dignity to avoid escalation that results in unnecessary, full-blown conflict. Some responses may satisfy a person's momentary need for power and revenge, but they are often destructive and may lead to suffering, negative attitudes, loneliness, and feelings of regret.

Church conflict can render the ministries of a congregation useless if allowed to continue. Someone has compared church conflict to the analogy of pouring sand into the bearings of a machine: any progress being made will eventually grind to a halt.

The Effect on Our Spiritual Life

Explain how relationships affect our spiritual health.

What resulted from Adam's disobedience?

God intended for us to live in perfect relationship with Him and with others in His created order. Yet even in the biblical account in the Garden of Eden, we find interpersonal tension between the Creator and His creatures. Even though they were living in a perfect environment with all of their needs met, Adam and Eve gave in to doubts planted by Satan. Their disobedience resulted in a broken relationship and alienation from God (thus, the Fall). Interpersonal conflict emerged as the blaming game began.

Explain how God's forgiveness has changed your own manner of living.

With separation from God or from each other, people stop growing emotionally and spiritually. We all live with the spiritual consequences of that first broken relationship with God. What makes grace so amazing is that God has freely taken the initiative to redeem, heal, and reconcile our

relationship to Him. That enables the restoring of relationships between us in the human drama of life.

Lesson 1.2 Maintaining the Minister's Personal Relationships

Jesus asks, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?” (Luke 9:25). We often apply this question to the wealthy and powerful in our cultures. But we must also ask ourselves the same question. We all know stories of high-profile ministers who have built large ministries with huge followings, and they have fallen. The first step into danger is to believe that we are above those temptations. It is critical that I am careful of my own life from the beginning in order to end well and hear those wonderful words, “Well done, my good servant” (Luke 19:17).

Personal Relationship with God

Timothy was Paul's disciple. We learn something very important from that model. It is good to find an older, wiser mentor as you begin ministry. In our southern California region we have asked those wise, retired ministers to give their experience and wisdom to our young ministers. Now each area has someone available, just like Timothy had Paul.

Who is affected when a minister's personal life and relationship with God are neglected?

Paul instructed Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul wants to be sure Timothy understands that his life and doctrine must line up. He cannot teach one thing and live another. That combination will destroy his own walk with God and those he teaches. Paul wants Timothy to understand that the results of his ministry are not built just on his public teaching, but also on his private life. It is a spiritual law that is the foundation of ministry. It does not come easily. It requires perseverance—that daily stubborn patience that keeps on keeping on. It requires an alert guarding of your life. Watch! Keep guard! Do not take it for granted. Be careful.

Personal Priorities

Write a personal statement of commitment to two habits that are priority for your personal ministry life.

The pastor who does not maintain the strength of his or her personal walk with God will resort to fads and gimmicks and programs. What connects the great realities of God and the great realities of salvation to where I am called to serve and to the actual scheduling of my week? That question helps us to carefully scrutinize ourselves and plan our work.

According to Eugene Peterson (1987) in *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, two practices determine the shape of everything else: praying and studying Scripture. Besides being basic, the practices are quiet. They do not call attention to themselves and so often are not attended to. In the busy world of pastoral work, no one follows the pastor to keep a record of the hours of prayer and Scripture study in his or her life. It is very rare for someone to ask if we do.

Which of the directives in the text concerning prayer do you believe is the most essential and why?

Through prayer we bring ourselves to attention before God. If asked to explain why I pray, I respond by saying that I both want and need a daily conversation with my God. Additionally, I recognize my sins and need of forgiveness. I know that living in the world can be overwhelming and when that happens, common sense takes me to my knees.

Through prayer we can daily gain the affirmation and guidance that all humans need. I know that too often individuals turn to God as the last resort, when the better wisdom would be to remember Him as our first source for help. I have long believed that while serving in the army of the Lord, it is better to practice prayer from the day of our induction than to wait until we are in a foxhole on the front lines. Prayer works like glue, holding our faith together.

1. When You Pray, Write Down Your Words.

Spontaneity is often necessary. However, at other times, writing out petitions, gratitude, and praise puts your communication into sharper focus than spoken, generalized statements do. Some of my prayers have been little more than towers of Babel. I imagine you have felt that way too. Certainly, God understands our weaknesses. I am sure He does not expect every human prayer to

be a masterpiece of logic or fantastic prose. However, prayer is a discipline, and writing your inner thoughts gives a direction that otherwise is too easily confused.

2. When You Pray, Learn to Listen.

Someone has said that when some people pray, they hammer so loudly that they never hear the architect who is discussing the plans. I do not believe God is impressed by prayers that come from a polished speaker who talks incessantly. Sometimes my best prayers begin with these words: “God, here I am. Now what?” Then I quiet myself and listen.

3. Practice What You Pray.

Be willing to back your prayer with action. God puts limits on himself, and we are those limits. Do not ask God to put love in human hearts, and then go out and practice prejudice. Do not pray that the church would have an impact on society and then not participate in that impact yourself. Do not pray for God to give you a heavenly home and then daily mistreat your spouse or your children.

4. Do Not Pray Lazy Prayers.

The soft and sloppy prayer is an insult to God’s integrity and to yours. A half-hearted prayer is like a farmer pointing at the seed in the barn and never going out to till the ground and plant the seed. Prayers deserve intensity because you are dealing with power that can change the world.

Consider how the Lord’s Prayer begins: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9–10). When you pray those words, you cry out to the Lord that you are tired of earthly kingdoms where the wise are ruled by fools, where the fields that should be rich with harvest are destroyed by war, where good people are destroyed by evil.

Let the world be ruled by a kingdom that will let us live together as brothers and sisters, where no one tries to be a god, where the law of love makes human laws obsolete. It is indeed a prayer bigger than life, but we need that grandiosity.

5. Believe God is Attentive.

Most people pray too little; some pray too much. It is foolish to pray and then make your prayer time an anxiety center. Offer your prayer and carry your need close to your heart and soul. Believe that God hears and answers your prayer. Then get on with the business of living. In simple terms, trust in the Lord and then act like you do.

6. Know the God To Whom You Pray.

A young cynical medical intern, known for his atheism, once mockingly asked the hospital chaplain to pray that he might get some money because he was very low on funds. The chaplain replied, “If you had just met the chief surgeon, would you have asked him for money?”

“Well no,” he replied, “I would wait until I knew him a little better.”

“Exactly,” answered the chaplain and walked away.

You never graduate when it comes to learning about God. Do not take that fact lightly. Keep learning about the One you pray to. Read the Bible. Look up to the sky on a star-filled night with gratitude in your heart. Try to explain God to a small child with wonder in his or her eyes. Walk the mountaintops of another person's soul by reading great books or studying great art.

7. Be Obediently Patient.

Undergird your attitude by praying, "In your time, Lord, not mine. Your view from eternity is better than my view from a clock." The classic commentary on this kind of attitude reads like this:

He asks for strength that he might achieve.

He was made weak that he might obey.

He asks for help that he might do greater things.

He was given infirmity that he might do better things.

He asks for riches that he might be happy.

He was given poverty that he might be wise.

He asked for power that he might have the praise of men.

He was given weakness that he might feel the need of God.

He asked for all things that he might enjoy life.

He was given life that he might enjoy all things. (Anonymous)

8. God Already Knows Your Thoughts.

Remember how it is when your child stands by your side and shares a thought. Most likely you already know what will be said. It is not so much a revelation as it is the cementing of a relationship. So it is with your Heavenly Father. Your prayer is not the unveiling of your secret. It is rather the establishment of your relationship. Praying is participating in a miracle. It is kneeling with both knees on the ground while the soul stretches toward heaven. It is communicating with the Creator, an event staggering in its truth. I have never prayed the perfect prayer, but always, I have prayed to the perfect God.

Defend and apply the truth that personal study of God's Word is a priority.

Identify two portions of Scripture that have most profoundly shaped your view of God.

Studying Scripture is an act of attending to God in His speech and action. An important part of any relationship is communication. God's Word communicates His message, His acts, and His love personally. It is the food I eat and the air I breathe. I cannot live without it. Every time I board an airplane I see a critical example of why a minister must attend to God's Word before anything else. The airline attendants walk down the aisle, encouraging folks to buckle their seat belts, and they make sure all the safety measures have been completed. Trays are put away and seat backs are straight. The time for take off nears. Then the captain asks that passengers give attention to the attendants as they demonstrate what to do in the event of an emergency. In case of a change in pressure, the oxygen masks will drop down. If anyone is caring for children or others who are dependent, that passenger must put his or her oxygen mask on first, or he or she will quickly run out of air. If the caregiver runs out of air, he or she will not be able to provide the care others need.

The above analogy illustrates how vital it is for ministers to nurture themselves in God's Word. Following are four recommendations for reading God's Word.

1. When You Read God's Word, Examine Your Heart.

Yes, we are sinners. Only Truth can set us free. God's Word will convict and call to repentance. A few years ago, a Gallup poll alerted Christians to the shocking paradox that while morality is losing ground, religion is gaining. America is, on the surface at least, one of the most religious nations in the world, yet in terms of ethical behavior, we may be one of the least ethical. We may be suffering from what Anglican Bishop Michael Marshall (2003) has called "Decaffeinated Christianity," a condition that promises not to keep us awake at night. Perhaps we will stay awake when we read 1 Samuel 16:7, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' "

2. Open Your Ears.

"He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). Listen with an open heart that is willing to be taught. God's Word will correct and instruct you personally, if you just listen. Give it your full attention. How many times have you had your Bible on your desk and as the sun began to set, you looked guiltily at it? Then, you picked it up and hurriedly read through a chapter. Your eyes saw the words, your lips formed them, but did your heart hear them? Listening is part of a two-way relationship. It takes focus.

3. Open Your Mind.

We often have our minds already made up on a topic before we really explore what God might have to say about it. This generation is all about thinking outside the box. That means being willing to find new ways to solve problems; it means being open to do different things and to do things differently. If you really want to think out of the box, read God's Word. Stories make up 70 percent of the Bible. Those stories demonstrate God's power, His judgment, and His grace. They will motivate and encourage us to dream bigger and expect greater results than ever before.

For instance, when Mary met Jesus days after her brother's death, she said that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus' life-giving presence always provides so much more than is ever expected.

When the widow followed Elijah's instructions to collect vessels and fill them with oil, could she have ever imagined an answer like that from the prophet? When you go to God's Word, is its bounty limited to the size of your own expectations?

4. Open Your Eyes.

God will direct your path, not so that you will be the greatest pastor of a mega-church, but so that you will know His will for you. He will give you lenses to see the world around you in a clearer light. He will show you safe paths so that you can avoid tripping and falling. He will give you a standard to measure what you see in the world. You will not be left to your own imagination.

A consistent diet of God's Word increases our grasp on reality as the Scriptures make sense of our existence and point us to the way. His way is a great way, a life-changing way, and His way transforms our minds from spiritual darkness to spiritual enlightenment, bringing hope for us all.

Pastoral work that comes out of the daily practice of prayer and reading God's Word is shaped by God. The following passages offer scriptural support for this truth:

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. (Romans 8:6–7)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. (Isaiah 26:3)

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)²

² T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 12–23.

Chapter 2 The Minister's Foundation for Relationship

We are created in the image of God as social beings (Genesis 2:18). We need others to develop and grow the way God intended. Thus, relationships are essential to our lives. In the area of ministry, the daily relationship challenges can only be handled well when ministers carefully maintain their own personal growth.

E. Stanley Jones, the old-time Methodist doctor and missionary to India, wrote *The Divine Yes* when he was eighty-nine. This was after he had suffered a massive stroke that took away 90 percent of his speech and left him paralyzed so that he was only able to speak with great difficulty into a tape recorder. The book was the final dream of his life, dictated with the remaining 10 percent of his ability.

He relates in the book that the center strands of the ropes used by the Swiss climbers are the strongest and are capable of bearing the weight of a man even if all the edges of the rope have worn off. The inmost strands are the strongest.

Jones writes, “The inmost strands belonging to the kingdom of the person of Jesus, and one’s experience of Him holds me as much as the total rope, for the inmost strands are strongest. I need no other props to hold up my faith, for my faith holds me. I do not possess my faith; my faith possesses me” (Jones 1992).

Jesus not only lived a relationally rich life, but taught others of the value and importance of relationships. His Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5–7, offers important keys to assure that the inmost strands are the strongest.

Lesson 2.1 Foundations for Relationships from Matthew

Objective

2.1.1 Identify characteristics necessary for Christians in relationship-building.

Lesson 2.2 Foundations for Conduct from Romans

Objectives

2.2.1 Identify the principal measure of all our actions.

2.2.2 Explain how to keep spiritual fervor.

2.2.3 Define persecution.

Lesson 2.3 Foundations of Love from Corinthians

Objectives

2.3.1 Define love according to 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

2.3.2 Explain how a love attitude affects everything you do.

Lesson 2.1 Foundations for Relationships from Matthew

I recognize that I am half of the equation that defines my relationship with one other individual. That makes it my responsibility to work on my personal development so that my contribution to the relationship is based on Scripture. The wise minister measures his or her own actions against the standards Jesus taught in Matthew 5–7. Take a personal inventory as you study these verses.

Tools for Relationship-Building

Peacemaker (Matthew 5:9)

Identify characteristics necessary for Christians in relationship-building.

How is a peacemaker different from a pacifist?

Do I intentionally seek to make peace with others? Jesus' sacrificial life is our model. He made peace between God and humanity and between individuals. Being a peacemaker does not mean the same thing as being a pacifist. We are not to merely pacify or appease others. Our peacemaking integrates the message of the gospel. It is an intentional move towards reconciliation. Walls are broken down and the broken pieces are used in the rebuilding, just like in the Old Testament story of Nehemiah. The peacemaker not only avoids division, bitterness, and strife, but also takes steps daily that will produce peace in relationships.

Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13–16)

What must happen if salt loses its saltiness, and what does that illustrate for the child of God?

Salt and light are change agents on their environment. Salt flavors and preserves. Matthew 5:13–16 does not make this change-agent role optional. There are consequences for those who have lost their saltiness as salt is necessary for human life. Without it, cells dehydrate and die. Salt creates thirst. Spiritually speaking, we must ask ourselves, “Do I make people thirsty enough to seek God for the answers to life’s questions?”

Light reveals sin and shows the way. When you shine a light in a dark closet, the dark and hidden things can be seen and dealt with. When the path is dark, a flashlight prevents tripping over obstacles or falling over the edge. Am I light in my relationships? Does my presence bring clarity to difficult situations? Are people safer because they are on the same path with me? On a stormy night, a single light shining from a window can guide a son or daughter to the front door. That image serves as a word picture for how we can be a light to spiritually guide a lost individual to Christ.

Friendliness (Matthew 5:47)

Read also Romans 16, Colossians 4, and John 10. Proper salutation in the biblical era was a mark of courtesy and respect, not just to other believers but also to those in the community. One Sunday morning after preaching what he thought was a potent message on friendliness, an associate pastor was met by an elderly lady who asked him, “Do you know my name? Do you know how long I have been a member of this church?” The associate pastor confessed that he did not know her name. She replied, “You need to practice being friendly before telling us to do so!”

Honesty (Matthew 5:33–37)

Honesty is the first step in building trust. Today’s world is inundated with words—the media have reached the farthest corners of the earth. For instance, when people in a remote country buy *Coke*, they know exactly what they are getting. Can the same be said about you and your honest word? When you say yes, does it mean yes? Is your word your bond?

Humility (Matthew 6:1–18)

Describe a situation where you felt an individual was praying or speaking publicly in a manner to draw inappropriate attention to himself or herself. How did you feel in that moment?

Prayer had a prominent place in Jewish life, and in synagogue worship someone might be asked to pray publicly in front of the congregation. Thus, Jesus identifies potential for a wrong motive in prayer: “to be seen by men” (Matthew 6:5–6). The same is true for fasting. Jesus condemns fasting for show. He forbids any sign of a fast because the human heart so easily can mix motives, and the desire to seek God will be diluted by the desire for human praise. The solution is not to abolish public prayer or fasting, but to set it within a biblical framework. This area requires great diligence on the part of the conscientious minister because the ministry job description includes praying in front of the entire congregation. Does your voice change to impress the audience? Do you think about your choice of vocabulary because a certain learned professor is in the congregation? Pride can quickly derail our efforts to maintain an authentic, *real me* pattern of leadership.

Confidence in Christ (Matthew 6:25–34)

Why might the minister feel a natural compelling toward competition?

The point of Matthew 6:25–34 is not that we need not work. Birds do not simply wait for God to drop food into their beaks; they work for their living, and so should we. The root of anxiety spoken of in the passage is unbelief. We live differently from those who have no trust in God’s fatherly care and who have no fundamental goals beyond material things. This confidence will color interactions at every level of ministry. When we stop struggling to outshine our coworkers, we take the pressure off our work relationships. Our confidence and expectations are in Christ. When this is part of our foundation, we can avoid much of the disappointment with people that leads to discouragement and broken relationships.

Mercy (Matthew 7:1–5)

Here is the paradox: We have a *just* God who is full of *mercy*. The command to “judge not” is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous. Jesus does not tell us to suspend our critical reasoning that distinguishes us from animals, but we are to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God by setting ourselves up as judges.

Kindness (Matthew 7:12)

We treat others as we want to be treated, not because we expect the same in return, but because such conduct is the goal of the law and prophets. We live by this rule as a part of the bigger picture. How we treat others is directly related to how God treats us. It is the direct result of what is in our hearts and cannot be hidden. Ask yourself if you treat clerks and janitors with the same kindness as executives or superintendents.

Two Builders and Two Houses

Living in Southern California, I understand how critical the quality of workmanship is. An earthquake will quickly reveal two types of houses: those built with lots of shortcuts and those built to specifications with quality materials and craftsmanship.

Likewise, a wise minister builds to withstand stormy relationships with church boards, community leaders, and even family members. Those who have taken shortcuts and depended on quick-fix, self-help books may look good from the outside. However, when the storms of life come, their true foundation will be obvious to all.

Lesson 2.2 Foundations for Conduct from Romans

The principles of Romans 12:9–21 provide a personal foundation for conduct. Picture yourself walking through a crowded restaurant with a full cup in your hand when someone bumps into you. Whatever is in the cup will spill out on the unsuspecting person in your path. Is it hot and scalding or cool and refreshing? That cup can illustrate the content of your soul. When the situations of life create friction, what will come of your soul? What from your soul will spill onto the person in your path? Will it be anger or will it be love?

As ministers, our conduct is under close scrutiny. We often overlook Paul’s letter to the Romans that teaches love as the foundation for all of our actions. Paul develops a clear standard for our relationships with other Christians and gives practical applications. Now is the time to develop the personal discipline to monitor your own conduct and maintain spiritual integrity.

The Standard of Love

Identify the principal measure of all of our actions.

Love is primary and must be sincere and without ulterior motives. Ulterior motives do not have the other person’s best interest at heart. James 2:8 says, “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.” It may be easy to say the words, but how can you measure the integrity of those words? If you fail to love your brother or sister, can you really say you love God?

Identify an individual who has strongly demonstrated the principle of love in his or her leadership for Christ.

The word for love in Romans 12:10 is *philadelphia*, meaning “brotherly love.” As brothers and sisters, members of the same family of God, how do we treat each other? Do we demonstrate preferring others in our relationships? The world will know if we are authentic followers of Christ by how we treat each other.

Consider John Wooden, UCLA’s legendary basketball coach. Wooden had a rule for his players. When one of them made a basket, he was to immediately look for the teammate who either passed the ball, or who blocked out the opponent allowing the player to score, and point him out. The team celebrated the one who set up the score. It is a way of saying *thanks*, and was one of Wooden’s unbending rules. If a player did not point and say *thanks*, that player did not play.

Wooden’s goal was to create teamwork, to build spirit, and he did it by making sure his players recognized the contributions of those whose work made possible their score, whose unselfishness allowed them to succeed (Wooden and Nater 2006, 202).

Saying thank you is not just a nice habit. It reminds us that when someone responds to the wonderful message you preached and comes to the altar, there may well have been an entire team that made that moment possible. Remember the worker who cleaned the room the day before, the musicians who practiced, and the ushers who maintained a calm order. Honor those people more than your own contribution.

Spiritual Fervor

Explain how to keep spiritual fervor.

Romans 12:11 says, “Keep your spiritual fervor.” Consider how to put this into practice in your life. First Thessalonians 5:19 says, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” This indicates that we have a personal responsibility to maintain that fervor, that fire! We cannot excuse ourselves based on feelings or emotions. Fortunately, Paul does not leave us on our own. He shares his blueprint for maintenance: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

“Joyful in hope” is not a smile painted on a false face. It is an inner spring that floods today’s difficult circumstances with hope. It is not a formula claiming or imagining a different set of

circumstances than our reality. It is about seeing today's circumstances through the eyes of hope. An excellent example of this is found when the twelve spies were sent into Canaan. Ten saw the circumstances and succumbed to fear. Only two saw the giants through the eyes of hope based on God's Promised Land (Numbers 14).

What does impatience do to our focus?

“Patient in affliction” is a quality Paul practiced in his own life. He did not set his own pain the thorn he references above his calling. He approached that with the same patience he required of the Christians in Rome. It may be easier to understand, if we look at *impatience*. Impatience looks for a quick escape from the affliction. Impatience demands a speedy answer and when it does not come, it leads to anger and bitterness. Impatience puts *my* comfort before God's plan. Impatience takes my focus off of maintaining the fervor and distracts me from a higher purpose.

“Faithful in prayer” is about communication with God. The fervor in any relationship will flicker and die without communication. Faithful in prayer means to listen as well as to speak. It is constantly being attuned to hear from Him. Paul tells us to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How can anyone do that? Remember that prayer occurs in a relationship. We constantly listen as He speaks to us.

Authentic Relationship

Romans 12:9–12 focuses on what is inside us. Verse 13 asks us to lift our eyes and become aware of those around us. When we consider God's people who are in need, it is natural to respond. This is a mark of an authentic relationship with God. It is love in action. The world will recognize and value our faith when they see active love among the members of the body. If one member does not care for one in need and walks by like the priest or the Levite (Luke 10:30–32), then his or her words are empty. When we peel back the layers of our motivation to see what is in our hearts, we must ask this question: Do we help others in need so that the world will admire us, or do we help others in need because God's love in us compels us?

Being hospitable (v. 13) is another aspect of Christian living that measures heart attitudes and reveals our true motivations. Hospitality is about opening your home. It does not depend on having a large or spotless dwelling. It does not depend on *who* you provide hospitality to, whether he or she is poor or rich. In fact, we are advised that we may not even realize it when we entertain angels (Hebrews 13:2).

Persecution

What are some examples of “do not curse” when you are persecuted?

Define persecution.

Notice the absence of the word *if* in Romans 12:14. It does not say *if* you are persecuted. Paul knows that you *will* encounter persecution sometime in your spiritual journey. Practice this principle and you will be ready for it. As often happens in Scripture, our strategies are not His. Instead of presenting a defensive argument, Paul tells us to bless the one who is discriminating against us, harassing us, or undermining our efforts. We must neither curse nor wish harm to our persecutors. Instead, we will ask God to bless the persecutor. This is another example of how our ways are not His ways. It is a test of our faith and obedience when we are confronted with such a challenge. In Proverbs 16:25, we read that “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

This kind of upside down lifestyle contrasts the difference between God’s people and the world. Paul tells us to “live in harmony” (Romans 12:16). This musical term makes me think of singing with a worship team. When they are singing an upbeat happy song, so do I. When they sing a sad, minor melody, so do I. I am listening to those around me, and I am sensitive to their joys and sorrows. Living in harmony means that I am constantly aware of those around me. I am not thinking so highly of myself that I position others lower and myself higher. It is my job to listen to the music and sing my part.

From verse 17 to the end of the chapter, we find a description of the steps necessary to live at peace when conflict is around us. It is a difficult task to let go of our own rights and not defend ourselves. Instead, we leave that to God. This surrender demonstrates an incredible trust in Him and also protects us from ourselves when we would rush in and make a bigger mess. Ephesians 6:11 instructs us on our only strategy for warfare: “Put on the full armor of God ... [and] stand.” There are no attack strategies.

2.3 Foundations of Love from Corinthians

When you find a thought repeated four times within a seventy-five-word biblical paragraph, you must take special notice. In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul uses “if I” to introduce four aspects of greatness that humanity highly values.

- If I have great speech gifts
- If I have great prophetic and mental gifts
- If I have great faith gifts
- If I have great financial gifts

Then Paul uses a conjunction that dismisses everything that went before it: but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

List the key questions for achieving self-control.

Ask three questions as an effective tool for self-control:

1. Is my anger out of proportion to the circumstance?

Disproportionate anger makes resolution difficult, if not impossible. For anger to have healthy results, it needs to be reasonable and thus, controllable. It needs to allow you to approach the target of your anger in a way that will let the person hear what you’re saying and make him/her more likely to consider making adjustments.

2. Is the momentary release I will get from expressing my anger worth the long-term havoc it will wreak?

The very nature of anger promotes exaggerated emotions. We say and do things we never would otherwise. Those words and actions never can be undone.

3. Is my anger worth dragging other uninvolved people into it?

Anger invariably affects the people around you. It’s human nature to take sides even when you’re not involved. Anger is usually a self-centered emotion. Your attention is turned inward on the wrong you’ve suffered, the wound you’ve had inflicted. In contrast, the principle of selflessness is woven consistently throughout the entire Bible: viewing others as more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3); dying to your desires and your wounds (**Matthew 16:24**). Such an attitude isn’t accomplished through destructive

expressions of anger.
(Mathers 2004, 44)

Practiced Love

Define love according to 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

Paul describes love’s characteristics in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. He does not describe a feeling or a state of being. Rather, Paul details how love is practiced in day-to-day relationships. Every Christian response is measured by these qualities of love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs” (vv. 4–5).

List some of the characteristics of love.

How many times have I found myself wanting in these areas? Am I like a child in a classroom, who waves a hand insistently, ready to burst out thoughts and gain the teacher’s admiration with no regard for another student? Do I listen to my coworkers during staff meeting and affirm their ideas even if they are different from my own? Do I take advantage of my position to overrule a coworker? On Sunday morning, do I avoid the board member who dismissed my fragile idea so quickly at last night’s meeting?

When my own ego is out of the way, there is room for me to gain a measure of wisdom. When I start listening instead of thinking what I am going to say next, I may learn something valuable. “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” (Proverbs 18:17).

Dealing with Anger

How do I handle anger? It is interesting that verse 5 of the love chapter says “not easily angered.” It does not say “never angered.” In Ephesians 4:26–27, Paul expands on this lesson on anger. “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Put Paul’s advice into practice. Do not allow your anger to take root. Deal with it as quickly as possible or it gives the enemy a place to enter your ministry. It is not the emotion of anger that is sinful, but how we *respond* to our anger. We need to respond in a way that brings positive resolution. We need to be careful in what we allow to provoke our anger. Too often it springs from small matters—none of which warrants the energy that anger wastes or the control it assumes over us.

In the last church Judy and I pastored, there was a young couple I had counseled and then married. They were strong and personable, but I soon found out that they were also capable of sowing hurt and division in the church, especially through the small group they led. Several couples who left the church pointed back to this couple whose criticism of the church life undermined confidence in the work. We talked, and a little later they were not seen in our services. I felt resentment! That was in September.

A Christmas Eve family communion was a tradition at the church. Judy and I spent two or three hours in an organized plan of serving communion and praying with family groups and others at the altar as they came, spent time, and left. Judy and I usually took communion at the end with the last group.

On that Christmas Eve, the first group to arrive included this couple. About twelve members of their family came, smiling, shaking hands, and saying, “Good to see you again, pastor!” “We sure do miss you, pastor.” We got to the altar and all knelt. I opened to Colossians 3:15–17 and began to read:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Then Judy said, “We are so glad you are the first ones here. We usually wait until the end of the evening to take our communion, but instead we would like to share it with you now, at the beginning of the evening. Could we?” We did, and a thorough cleansing, redemptive, transaction took place in our souls. The altar is a healing place for sins and for memories of wrongs given and received. Leave them there!

Celebrate Truth

What does it take for us to consistently hate what is evil and love what is good?

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:6–7).

This is not hard to understand, so why is it so difficult to practice? Hollywood makes billions of dollars based on humanity’s willingness to wallow in immorality. News programs would go broke if all they had to report was good news. Talk shows thrive on people’s thirst for all the messy details.

To hate evil and love good takes practice. It takes self-control (Galatians 5:23) to not give in to our natural tendency to listen to a good story about a coworker. One half of the destructive process of slander includes a willing listener. With no listener, there is no story. Walk away, or intervene on their behalf. Be a protector, not a destroyer.

The Attitude of Love

Explain how a love attitude affects everything you do.

Paul urges us to push ahead to make this real, active love the prevailing view through which we see everything in life. You cannot always choose your circumstances, but you can always choose your attitude. Again, look at how many times the word *always* is used in one verse. “It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:7).

In many sports, the difference between winning and losing is small. In a race, the difference between first place and last place can be less than a second. In soccer, centimeters can make the difference between victory and defeat. We cannot afford to take our eyes off the goal for even a moment.

My job is to love and serve Jesus. I cannot do that if my heart wanders into a wilderness of bitterness, revenge, and unforgiveness. Read Luke 6:37–38 in *The Message Bible*:

Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, and criticize their faults unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that harness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.

And Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:48 are these: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” *The Message Bible* translates them this way: “In a word, what I’m saying is, grow up.

You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."

It seems to me that Jesus is saying, "Release your life's potential, take off the blindfolds, widen your perspective, and look at life from a grace point of view."

How have you seen a minister's spirit of love impact others?

The best things most often happen when your attitude is pointed in the direction of grace and generosity. It was a Saturday morning. I was at the airport and headed for Dallas. The plane was already packed when I trudged toward the back of the plane, lugging two carry-on bags. I got to my row and found an older lady sitting in my seat. I paused; people were waiting behind me, and then I said, "I am sorry, madam. I think you are in my seat."

"Oh, no, it is not your seat, sir. This one is mine!" She looked at me with a tough sweetness, then slowly opened her purse for her ticket, poured over it a long time, then showed it to me. Her seat was actually 10C, but not clearly marked. I showed her the error. She was, indeed, in my seat. She blinked and smiled sweetly, "Well, would you let me sit here? You can have my seat," as she handed me her ticket.

I wanted my own assigned seat. By this time, for me to walk the twenty rows back up the plane's crowded aisle, against traffic, looked impossible. She could see the same thing and looked mournfully at me. I winced inside, but made the tough decision. "Sure!" I said.

Even though I had made the decision, my mind continued to race and imagine the worst, "Hers is probably a center seat. I will be between two people who will take up all the room. I always ask for an aisle seat. It is a long flight." But I had said, "Yes." So back up the aisle I went, bucking traffic. People were not smiling as they glared at me. I could almost read their minds, as if they were saying to themselves, "It is really his fault, trying to oust that nice, elderly lady from her seat. Who does he think he is? Good for her. She sent the guy packing."

I had to get back to the front of the plane. People groaned and some shouted, "Back out, back out, this man has got to get out." "What's wrong?" I heard someone ask. "This guy went to the wrong seat!" "Great!" complained someone else. I groped and stumbled my way past them toward seat 10C. By then all the overhead bins were full.

Just as I finally settled into my new "no leg room" seat behind the first class curtain, the flight attendant appeared at my elbow and asked, "Would anyone be willing to get off this flight and take the next one? We are overbooked." My head popped up. I knew what that meant. I looked up at her and said, "I will do it." Twenty people behind me were screaming in chorus, "I will," as they scrambled to get out of their seats to volunteer.

But I was in seat 10C, up front, right beside the lady making the offer, who said to me, "Please come with me, sir." They took me back to the gate, gave me a three-hundred dollar voucher for

my inconvenience, and put me on the next flight out, one hour later. I boarded the next flight, first in line; my seat was 4B in first class. The flight attendant took my coat, hung it up, and brought me juice as I watched the lines of passengers tramping their way back to their seats. They gave me a hot towel to refresh my face and hands. They brought me coffee in a china cup, poached salmon on a linen tablecloth with a linen napkin, and kept coming back to ask if I would like anything else.

All the while I was thinking, “What is happening here? I do not deserve this.” Things did not look too good for me for a while, but with some patience, they turned out great. I was glad I had not put up too much of a fuss. A little bit of humility back there had gone a long way.

Sometimes things do not work out like you think they should. There are times you are a victim of circumstance. You take what feels like undeserved abuse. But situations have a way of changing. Hold steady; give a little. Somebody gets your place. You have been ousted, put in a tough spot, even embarrassed, and it is not your fault. You are the one called on to make a sudden adjustment.

Be patient and humble. Decide, as Jesus taught, to “Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you” (Matthew 5:48, *The Message Bible*). Then interesting things may follow. Someone may put a voucher in your pocket, move you into first class, and treat you like a king or queen. Just remember that regardless of your present circumstances, the end of the story is still being written for you.

“Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.” (Matthew 6:33–34, *The Message Bible*)³

³ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 26–35.

Chapter 3 Building a Strong Marriage and Family

Perhaps one of the most crucial responsibilities of ministers is to build their home well and with intentional care. Some ministers have a tendency to place church-building at the top of their list and manage home-building with whatever leftover time and energy they might have. This is a dangerous lifestyle that can give the enemy a foothold. If his or her house is not strong, the minister will not be as effective in church building.

First Timothy 3 provides an overview of the expectations of leaders in the church that demonstrates how important this principle is. For this reason, I want to take a look at some hard-learned lessons in building a marriage that will survive storms. The instructions for what a marriage was ordained to be and how it is to function are found in the often-cited *marriage passage* in Ephesians 5:21–33. Review that passage. Remember, its context is a lesson on how the church functions. Paul presents marriage as a picture of God’s relationship to His church. This underscores the importance of the Proverbs 24:3–4 principle we will study in this chapter. Building your house is like building a little part of the church. When you get it right at home, you will be more prepared to get it right in the bigger context.

Lesson 3.1 Secrets for Building a Strong Marriage

Objectives

- 3.1.1 *Identify a significant barrier to close relationship.*
- 3.1.2 *Describe ways of showing support for your partner.*

Lesson 3.2 Knowing and Doing

Objectives

- 3.2.1 *Explain the difference between knowledge and understanding.*
- 3.2.2 *Define wisdom.*
- 3.2.3 *Explain the meaning of the Hebrew word *hesed*.*

Lesson 3.3 Marriage and Prayer

Objectives

- 3.3.1 *Discuss how prayer can be affected by inequality in a marriage.*
- 3.3.2 *Explain how intercession is an integral part of a Christlike marriage.*

Lesson 3.4 Children and Ministry

Objectives

- 3.4.1 *Explain the effect of public criticism on a child.*

- 3.4.2 *Discuss the needs of children.*
- 3.4.3 *Explain ways a parent can protect a child.*
- 3.4.4 *Indicate why humility is a good foundation for parenting.*

Lesson 3.1 Secrets for Building a Strong Marriage

“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures” (Proverbs 24:3–4). Within that passage are the keys to an effective family life, an enduring marriage, and satisfying relationships. Apply this passage to your home life, and it will spill over into healthy relationships in all aspects of your life, profession, and ministry. Knowledge is awareness of *what* to do. Understanding is knowing *how* to do it. Wisdom is knowing *when* to do it. The partners in a good marriage have mastered how to do what and what to do when.

Knowing What to Do

Identify a significant barrier to close relationship.

Do you know the enemy of your relationship? It is YOU! Selfishness is the biggest barrier to intimacy. The first and hardest step is getting beyond your own selfish interests, desires, and expectations and moving toward knowing and unlocking the mysteries of your spouse. We need to learn and understand the languages of love.

Love Language #1	Words of Affirmation
Love Language #2	Quality Time
Love Language #3	Receiving Gifts
Love Language #4	Acts of Service
Love Language #5	Physical Touch

(Chapman 1992)

Discovering my partner's history, dreams, and goals for the future is an exciting journey it takes time and genuine effort. I have learned to know my wife's preferences for how to best communicate love to her. In other words, I understand what language of love is most effective for her. Similarly, my wife has discovered the love languages that most effectively make me feel secure in her love.

What is the first step in effective communication with your spouse?

Listening is the first step in effective communication. Research indicates that only 7 percent of what we hear from our spouses involves words (content), 38 percent involves tone of voice, and the remaining 55 percent is made up of various non-verbal forms of communication.

The verbal part of communication is far from simple. It involves at least eight steps. These are presented from the husband's perspective. However, it works the same in reverse.

1. What husband intends to say to wife
2. What husband actually says to wife
3. What wife hears
4. What wife says to herself about what she has heard
5. What wife intends to say back to husband
6. What wife actually says to husband
7. What husband hears
8. What husband says to himself about what he hears

Obviously, communication can break down anywhere along the eight steps. It takes a lot of patience, understanding and good humor for women and men to get anything straight between them.

Listening

Listening is not thinking of what you will say when the other person stops talking. Give your spouse your full attention. When my daughter was excitedly telling me about her day, she stopped and asked whether or not I was listening. I said I was listening. She responded, "You do not *look* like you are listening." Attentive listening is a great gift for the other person. Listening is acceptance without judgment of what is said and how it is said. Listening is the ability to restate accurately the content and feeling of a message.

Charlie W. Shedd, a noted author and Presbyterian pastor, wrote about listening and made seven promises to a loved one. Consider these promises from a loving listener:

1. I will try to concentrate on what you are saying. I will train myself to put my work aside, the paper aside, anything aside and turn off what I'm thinking to focus on your words.
2. I will try to feel what you are feeling. This may be hard, but I will sincerely make the effort to get behind your words and experience what is in your heart.
3. I will give you a chance to say it all. I will hold my tongue and not comment too soon.
4. I will try to prime your pump. I will ask questions. Sometimes I will say back to you what you have said until we both understand fully what you mean.
5. If I feel even the smallest anger from you toward me, I will try my best to control my fire.
6. I will not cop out by giving no answer when an answer is important. I will remember that silence is sometimes effective, but sometimes it's cowardly.
7. When you are hurting because you're down on yourself, I will assure you again that no matter what you think of you, I am still *up* on you. (Shedd 1978, 18)

Showing Support

Describe ways of showing support for your partner.

The marriage relationship must be nurtured. Nurturing takes a lot of time and resources. The care and feeding of an infant is a good analogy. For a baby to grow into a healthy person it takes more than just green vegetables and milk. Studies indicate that touch is important to the development of a child. The same can be said for our partner. Married couples need to nurture each other with touch, tenderness, kind words, mutual respect, and sensitivity.

While my wife and I were walking at Huntington Beach, we saw a couple on a bicycle built-for-two on the bike path. The husband was on the front seat with his wife on the back seat. He was all business, pedaling energetically. She was cruising behind him. Then we noticed as they drew closer that she was massaging his back and shoulders as they rode along. He looked so content.

What is the primary response women need from their husbands?

This couple's actions showcased the beauty of teamwork. We do our best work when another person is behind us, doing the things that most effectively encourage us to be our best. In a healthy

relationship, we take turns being in the back. So what is the most common complaint men have against women and vice versa? In my experience and reading, the men say, “Women try to change us! The women say, “Men do not listen; they try to fix it!” Women want empathy (to be heard), but instead they get solutions. Men want to be accepted for what they accomplish; they get corrections instead. Learn about the differences and celebrate them.

Lesson 3.2 Knowing and Doing

Explain the difference between knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge is your response, your obedient response, to building relationship. Gaining knowledge is obedience. It is the beginning point of relationship-building. This kind of knowledge comes from careful study and close observation of the other person. It comes from an honest and objective appraisal of those observations, and it must be built on a sincere desire to build the relationship.

Knowing How to Do It

How does knowledge differ from understanding?

Often the husband does not truly understand the wife’s point of view. The following illustration may help put things in perspective: An accountant’s wife cajoled him into staying home for a day to take care of their children while she looked for a job. When she returned he handed her the following report: dried tears nine times; tied shoes thirteen times; purchased sixteen toy balloons, average life of balloon, ten seconds; cautioned children not to cross street twenty-one times; number of times children crossed street, twenty-one. Number of times I will do this again, zero.

Here is what understanding really means:

- Understanding is coming to terms with knowledge.
- Understanding is enlightenment.

- Understanding is assimilating facts into behavior.
- Understanding is putting value on discovery.
- Understanding is seeing through your mate's eyes.
- Understanding is having insight.
- Understanding is listening.
- Understanding is timing and sensitivity.

Knowledge is awareness that the enemy of love is selfishness while understanding is dealing with the selfishness factor. Understanding is the place for grace. It is a real example of the mutual submission discussed in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 12. Consider the story of my friend George, who was a shoe repairman. He did it the old-fashioned way with a hammer and nails. On occasion he would hit his thumb with the hammer. When that happened, his right hand *always* put the hammer down and rushed to help his thumb. Forgiveness by the thumb was immediate to the hammer hand. All the resources and abilities of the hammer hand were put to the comfort of the injured thumb. The natural response of the human body is an ideal model for our behaviors within the body of Christ.

Knowing When to Do It

Define wisdom.

How would you define wisdom?

Wisdom has many parts. It includes the act of putting yourself aside on behalf of your spouse. It is also “marital sanctification,” to be set apart, consecrated, yours alone. Wisdom is taking knowledge and understanding and applying them effectively. It is responding through a godly filter rather than with a selfish or worldly filter. Wisdom means knowing that justice can never be satisfied. Thus, wisdom is redeeming!

Leroy Dokter, a good friend, once helped me put a trailer hitch on my car's rear bumper. He was underneath turning the big wrench to finally tighten all the bolts, and as he did, he stripped the threads. He leaned up in frustration and said, “You know, all my life I have always felt that any bolt just needs one more good twist. I have stripped more thread than anybody should.”

Relationships can suffer from that philosophy when applied in blame, accusation, or anger. Every day there are times when that “one more comment” should be left unsaid.

Wisdom is a critical factor in marriage. What does wisdom look like in day-to-day activities? Here is an example. A wife was a spic-and-span housekeeper, and the instruction to any person entering her house was, “Wipe your feet, please!” During a terrible rainstorm, her husband came home from work and spent five proud minutes at the doormat outside, cleaning, wiping, and brushing his shoes. Then he entered the house. His wife came to the front room excitedly telling him to get back outside and wipe and clean up his feet and shoes so he would not track the mud in the house. He stood there assessing. He had two choices: Tell her the facts or go back outside. He went back outside, stood around making scraping noises for a few minutes, then came back inside to a smiling wife who put her arms around his neck and said, “Thank you so much dear. You are so thoughtful!” That is a classic view of one spouse understanding the other. Someone said, “The secret of a happy marriage is leaving about three or four things unsaid each day.”

Covenant Love

Explain the meaning of the Hebrew word hesed.

True wisdom in marriage is when both partners remain committed to the covenant love that each promised at the time of marriage. Hebrew language of the Old Testament has a special word for love within the covenant: *hesed*. It is almost untranslatable. Here are some equivalents from these verses in the King James version:

- Loving-kindness (Psalm 51:1)
- Merciful kindness (Proverbs 11:17)
- Kindness (Joshua 2:12)
- Love (Jonah 4:2)
- Mercy (Exodus 20:5–6)
- Unfailing love (Isaiah 54:10)

Hesed is covenant love par excellence, taken to the highest level of devotion; it is love that keeps and fills the covenant between partners. “Because of the Lord’s great love (*hesed*) we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–23). God is more than kindly disposed toward us. He is determined to be absolutely faithful to us as His bride, and He is equally determined to fill His covenant with us with all the blessings we are willing to receive from Him.

Hesed is not just love, but love plus loyalty. It is not just loyalty, but loyalty plus love. *Hesed* goes beyond feelings to commitment. Commitment is not easily swayed; it is a carefully considered decision. The traditional marriage vow says, “And thereto, I pledge thee my troth,” meaning, “my faithfulness to the covenant.” *Troth* is an old English word that captures the nuances of covenant. With this word I say to my spouse, “I pledge to you my trust, reliability, stability, scrupulousness, authenticity, integrity, and fidelity.”

Describe the benefits when marital love fulfills the idea of *hesed*.

In marriage we need troth, loyal love, or *hesed*, more than anything else. Love is relational; and if the relationship is temporary, love like this can never be known! There is no instant joy in marriage. Without a binding pledge, without troth, and without *hesed*, few couples would survive the *for worse* experiences and the lean times that are an inevitable prelude to renewal and a deeper relationship.

The marriage covenant is not a padlock, but a safety net. It offers security. As a result, marriage partners, like trapeze artists, can completely trust each other.

Lesson 3.3 Marriage and Prayer

Hindered Prayer

Discuss how prayer can be affected by inequality in a marriage.

Read 1 Peter 3:7. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

A friend told me this story. It had been a long drive, and the boys were getting restless in the backseat. In fact, they were more than restless, they were bored and their playing had turned to

picking on each other. Then, as is often the case, it seemed like the younger one was getting the worst of it. So, when the older son asked for some candy, his dad said, “No.” But the boy did not accept that answer. A few minutes went by, and he asked again, “Dad, can I have a chocolate bar?” This time his dad explained his answer. It did not seem right to reward a bully.

Now, two things happened in that scenario that resulted in the negative response to a petition. First, the stronger of the two was making life difficult for the weaker. Second, by spending his energy on harassing his brother, he had missed the opportunity to engage in conversation with his dad. It is not difficult to see the parallels in a marriage relationship.

Here is another perspective from *The Message Bible*: “Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them; delight in them. As women, they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God’s grace, you’re equals. Treat your wives, then as equals, so your prayers don’t run aground” (1 Peter 3:7).

Why might God allow our prayers to be less effective when we fail to be just and nurturing in our marriage?

Marriage and prayer are uniquely related. It is wise for husbands and wives to invest time in praying together. Learning to pray as partners reinforces Peter’s lesson. When you are in God’s presence, you are joint heirs with Christ. When you and your spouse begin to pray together, your perspective changes. Both partners are looking up to the Father. In that position, there is not even a question of one mate looking down on the other.

The most difficult part of this lesson is putting the advice into practice. Here are some suggestions for overcoming the countless hindrances to regularly and effectively praying with your life mate:

- Do not wait for your spouse to suggest or request this.
- Begin today to pray together.
- Pray together daily, without fail.
- Keep it brief.
- Pray conversationally.
- Be natural.
- Do not preach in your prayer.
- Clear the air before you pray.
- Share Scripture that has helped you.
- Do not limit prayer to set times.

Intercession

Explain how intercession is an integral part of a Christlike marriage.

Ephesians 5:25 tells husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church.” Consider one primary way Jesus shows His love for the church—by interceding for her, as in Romans 8:34.

Write a brief definition of intercession.

An essential part of the man’s priestly role in the family is prayer, not only *with* his wife, but *for* her as well. While the emphasis is on the husband, these guidelines are equally helpful to the woman in ministry. Here are ideas for building a discipline of prayer for your spouse:

- Make it a point to ask your mate (daily, if possible) about her current concerns.
- Read between the lines for prayer needs she may be reluctant to express.
- Many people find a written prayer list helpful.
- Consider which ongoing needs your spouse may have and put them at the top of your list.
- Find a regular time in the day when you can pray especially for her.
- When she comes to mind during the day, turn the thought into a brief, one sentence prayer as a form of intercession.
- Pray for her frequently when you are away on a trip.
- When specific prayers are answered, share the victory with her.
- Finally, ask God how you can become part of the answer to your prayers for her.

Ephesians 5:25–27 instructs:

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke beauty. Everything He does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They’re really doing themselves a favor—since they are already one in marriage. (*The Message Bible*)

A solid marriage relationship is where personal needs are met most profoundly. Every person needs someone marching at the head of his or her parade. Every person needs somebody else’s strength. Every person needs to be needed.

Lesson 3.4 Children and Ministry

Once you have experienced parenthood and the melancholy that your kids have passed through your fingers, there comes an unexplainable, eerie feeling that makes you wish for time back again, both to do and undo a few things. But the reality is that what is gone is gone. Done. You cannot get it back.

A story is told of an architect who designed a complete college campus but left out the sidewalks. When asked about this omission, he said it was intentional. He first wanted to see where the students would be walking, and then he would put the sidewalks there, where the trails had been made. Parenting is not like this. With children, you have to put in the sidewalks first. Then you pray.

Words

Explain the effect of public criticism on a child.

Following are a few sidewalks and trails I have been on with my children and some things I have learned.

Words Can Heal or Hurt.

Why do the words of parents have such a strong impact on a child?

There is an immense difference between “You cannot” and “You can;” “You are ugly” and “You are beautiful;” “You are an idiot” and “You are okay;” “You do not have what it takes” and “You can do it if you try;” “I hate you” and “I love you;” “Do not count on me for anything” and “You can count on me for anything;” and “The devil’s got you, kid” and “God loves you.”

You can be sure that at some point in your ministry people in your church will decide you need parenting advice. They will give it freely, whether asked or not. The temptation is to silence the adviser and throw admonishments at the children without careful consideration.

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Scripture also instructs parents not to over-discipline their children (Ephesians 6:4). Public criticism or inappropriate discipline can wound a child. Even when a church member may come to you with a valid point, it is critical for your child to experience respect for his or her dignity. Healthy discipline patterns are consistent and fair. Children should know the boundaries and know what the consequences are for breaking the rules. A child will rise like an eagle on the positive air currents you provide with your healing words.

Complete Attention Is Necessary.

Discuss the needs of children.

Everyone is busy. If you are not careful, urgent matters will replace important ones. However, the urgent can wait. Focus on the important things. Your children need your attention.

Time and attention are crucial commodities in any family. I recall some of my blunders in this area. Often, I watched both my sons’ Little League games with either a book or sermon notes in hand, hustling for an edge in the process. Like many people, I have always been able to multitask. When my sons came up for their turn at bat, they would look my way to see if my eyes were on them. Though some of the best illustrations were on the ball field, I still should have left my sermon notes at home.

Patience Is Better Than Haste.

Why is it that we parents seem to have such quick triggers with our kids, but we give our friends the benefit of the doubt? My son was twelve, had his own money, and bought a catcher’s mitt. A bad mitt for too much money, I thought. And when he came to me in the shopping mall showing it off with a smile, I took it from him without thinking, walked with him back to the store, exchanged it for his money and said to him curtly, “Talk to me before you waste your money next time!” The look on his face still is etched on my consciousness. He had wanted to be like his dad, who was a baseball catcher, but his dad, without thinking, had not allowed him to give that creative and intuitive gift of love. I yearn to relive and correct that moment. It is not possible.

I have learned the joys of a meaningful relationship that come from treating my child as a person who has feelings. I have learned that if we want to be loved, respected, and cherished as we grow older, then we must love, respect, and cherish our children as they grow older.

Children’s Needs Differ from Their Parents’.

We quickly tuck our children in at night and turn out the lights in order to get back to the television, newspaper, or a book. Ringing in our ears are these words: “Tell me a story, Dad (or

Mom) about when you were a kid.” What they are really saying is this: “Talk to me; touch me. I am lonely in this room. I am not sleepy.” The bonding of soul-to-soul and heart-to-heart happens at unexpected moments. Do not be in a hurry; do not scuttle times when memories are being made.

My daughter said to one of her friends, “Get my Dad to tell you about the time when . . .,” and she launched into a monologue of a nearly forgotten bedtime story I had told her about the time when a big kid fell on me in school. I never have been able to sort out the memorable stories from the non-memorable. Who knows the difference? The mere telling of them is what matters most to a child. I remember my dad telling me about his hobo days during the Great Depression of the 1930s, about the time he hopped a train to get from South Alabama to Columbus, Georgia, and who he saw and what he did. I could have listened all night. He stopped too soon.

Life Is Not As Simple As It Looks for a Child.

Explain ways a parent can protect a child.

Children are just learning and have little ability to discern what is good, best, or better. They are gullible, and everything is so new. They are immersed in the wonders of the world; its beauties and ugliness are all new. Take your child by the hand and give confidence. Build his or her security by fastening down the noises of the unknown and mysterious intruders in their world. When they ask, who will take care of me? tell them. Build habits and consistent patterns into their days to help in the wholesome management of their lives.

How can teaching our children Scripture aid them in establishing security?

Teach the Scriptures to your children. At times you will reap more than you sow. You get back more than you deserve. It happened to me a few years ago at Ventura First Assembly at a ministerial enrichment conference. While standing in the lunch line, waiting my turn for pizza, a young lady from Ventura’s Teen Challenge Center turned, took my hand, and said, “We have never met but I have liked and admired you for a long time.” Surprised, I asked, “Why do you say that?” She said, “I was a student at Southern California College [now Vanguard University] with your son a few years ago. I was a punk, a loser, and lived on the edge. I finally had to leave school, but your son was always nice to me. He would talk to me and treated me like I was an important human being. I have thought about that a lot and believe that any guy who would treat a loser like me with respect must have a great father.” Thanks, son!

I am reminded of two passages of Scripture. “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. (Deuteronomy 6:1–2)

Maintain Balance in Crisis.

The modeling of how to behave when the chips are down teaches lessons words cannot. I do not understand many things. I need another perspective on what has happened and why. Often a different point of view relieves anxiety, brings objectivity, and breaks through misunderstandings. Work together. Two are better than one.

Indicate why humility is a good foundation for parenting.

It would be easy to fill an entire book with the things I have learned from parenting. I have learned that kindness and love freely given are freely returned. There are few joys on earth to rival a gift of love from a bright-eyed little person who carries in his or her hand all he or she can afford or create, saying, with or without words, “I love you.”

Humility is perhaps the most recognizable quality that connects all parents into one common family. The list of what we commonly do is long: changing diapers, cleaning the floor below the chair where our child has had supper, correcting our child for bad behavior, explaining to the neighbors what our child meant by the embarrassing thing he or she said, reading a poor report card, enduring our child’s hanging around our neck or leg when we are all dressed up, paying our teen’s fine, or sitting with him or her in the principal’s office. The list goes on.

How does allowing God to be our Father help us in parenting?

But we experience a humility crowned with privilege and honor. I believe that to honor your child as the child of God he or she is, is to pull over both your lives a canopy of esteem and love that will carry you humbly but happily through this world and into the next. God works the wonders and marvels of His grace through the openness of a child, my own child, in ways I never thought possible.

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). What does it take to please God and make it to heaven? Take a good look at your child, the right look, and ask yourself that question again.

What makes a good parent? I am not sure I know; just when I thought I had children all figured out, I had to think again. I recall a notable saying: “A father is someone who carries a picture in his wallet where his money used to be.” Marriage and parenting often put us in peril of pain, risks, and loss of control. Sometimes fulfilling the responsibilities of being a spouse or parent can be overwhelming! What, really, is God’s goal for parents? What is a realistic expectation? How can I best achieve it?

Thomas Fuller, a seventeenth-century chaplain, recorded this prayer:

Lord, I find the genealogy of my Savior strangely checkered with four remarkable changes in four immediate generations.

Rehoboam begat Abia; that is, a bad father begat a bad son.

Abia begat Asa; that is, a bad father, a good son.

Asa begat Jehoshaphat; that is, a good father, a good son.

Jehoshaphat began Joram; that is, a good father, a bad son.

I see, Lord, from hence, that my father’s piety cannot be handed on; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son. (Fuller, as cited by Custance 1988)

Quite possibly, the greatest reason for failure in marriage is unrealistic expectations. The average couple enters a marriage expecting a wedding to do what only God can do. God has specifications for the marriage relationship. To attempt to build a marriage without following that plan is to invite failure. That is why the psalmist said, “Except the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

A dynamic companionship with one’s partner is necessary to building a successful marriage. On her fiftieth wedding anniversary, a woman revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. She said, “On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband’s faults that I would overlook for the sake of the marriage.”

One of her guests asked her what those faults were. “To tell you the truth,” she replied, “I never did get around to making that list. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, ‘Lucky for him that is one of the ten!’ ” She never created the list, but she created something else over the years—an attitude of understanding and grace.

Certainly all husbands and wives should cultivate an attitude of understanding and grace. However, some faults should *not* be overlooked; some faults are sins that could lead to the destruction of people and relationships. On the other hand, some so-called faults are petty matters and are not worth fighting over. If something that your spouse does bothers you, but it has no bearing on your relationship, salvation, or safety, then perhaps it is petty. Petty matters can be mutually resolved without offending your spouse. We should determine whether a fault is serious

or petty and then settle the issue with our spouse accordingly. The husband and wife must both exercise an equal measure of understanding and grace.

So we are to live, serve, and play as a team. A family is about belonging. Make belonging to your family about the people in your family. Do things together; share common concerns; invite everybody to be a part of the family's work responsibility; enjoy special day celebrations, making people rather than gifts central. It is transforming for a child to hear prayers being prayed on his behalf; when his opinions are really listened to and valued; when he knows that he is important to the family and has a place in the family's affection.

Arthur Gordon tells an interesting story from his youth.

When I was around thirteen and my brother was ten, my dad had promised to take us to the circus. But at lunch there was a phone call, some urgent business required his attention downtown. My brother and I braced ourselves for the disappointment. Then we heard him say, "No, I won't be down. It will have to wait." When he came back to the table, mother smiled. "The circus keeps coming back you know." "I know," said father, "but childhood doesn't." (as cited in Hewitt 1988, 66)

Security, stability, and sacredness about life are values we can put deeply into our family's soul. We must live it. The verb "to train up" (Proverbs 22:6) occurs only three other times in the Scriptures, and each time it is translated "to dedicate." This training is further explained by the root of the Hebrew verb. It was used to describe the process of the Hebrew midwife who, at the time of birth, would plunge a finger into crushed dates and olive oil and rub the substance across the roof of the mouth of the newborn infant. The child was stimulated to suck and take nourishment, and this came to be translated as "create a desire." Thus, your life ought to demonstrate the reality and day-to-day relevance of Christian faith so that your children desire it.⁴

⁴ T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 38–48.

Chapter 4 Relationships and Differences

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Romans 12:4–6).

An ancient Persian king who wanted to discourage his four sons from making rash judgments devised an object lesson for them. At the king’s command, the eldest made a winter journey to see a mango tree, and then he returned home. Spring came, and the next eldest was sent on the same errand, and he returned. Summer followed, and the third son went and came home.

When the fourth son had returned from his autumn visit, the king called them together to describe the tree. The first said that it had looked like a burnt old stump. The second disagreed, describing it as lovely and lacy green; the third argued that its blossoms were as beautiful as a rose. The youngest son said they were all wrong: “Its fruit is like a pear.” The king’s response was that each son was right, for they each saw the tree in a different season.

And so must our perspectives be. When we hear or view another’s thoughts or actions, we must withhold judgment until we have seen the whole picture. One person’s interpretation repeated to others puts a deep-seated bias on those persons. We must ask ourselves if we are sure we have the whole picture. Did we hear correctly? Is what we saw the truth? Do we know the intent?

Jesus said, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1–2). This is the foundation we must stand on when our differences seem to hinder developing strong relationships.

Lesson 4.1 Human Beings Designed for Relationship

Objective

4.1.1 *Explain the importance of trust in a relationship.*

Lesson 4.2 Healthy Relationships and Respect

Objectives

4.2.1 *Describe how to demonstrate respect in relationships.*

4.2.2 *Explain the importance of respecting culture.*

4.2.3 *Develop two strategies to respect personal boundaries.*

Lesson 4.3 Boundaries that Protect

Objective

4.3.1 *Describe the long-term effects of relational vices.*

Lesson 4.4 Different or Disagreeable

Objective

4.4.1 *Identify concepts to remember when faced with disagreements.*

Lesson 4.1 Human Beings Designed for Relationship

Relationship is the point of connectedness between two people. This can be by birth; for instance, sisters are related. A relationship can be one of subservience; for instance, a private in the army is under command of an officer. Relationships can also be informal, as between two childhood friends. Or relationships can be formally structured, like marriage with a legal license. But always, relationship is about people connecting.

Trust

Explain the importance of trust in a relationship.

A relationship is a bond between two parties. It may be intimate or distant or anywhere in between. An appropriate amount of confidence is associated with any relationship. The more intimate the relationship, the more confidence we have in the other party. The word *confidence* comes from the Latin word meaning “faith,” which originally meant “good faith.” Confidence is simply a measure of how certain we are of the *good faith* of the other party to the relationship. We believe the words and actions of those who have our confidence. In other words, those individuals have credibility in our eyes. The more confidence we have in a relationship, the more trust we have. This trust will be revealed in our actions, not just in our words.

Consider how this principle of good faith influences every relationship in our lives. Start personally. Self-confidence is measured by how certain we are of our *own* good faith. I say to myself, I am going to run a mile every other day. When I do it, I build my self-confidence. When I do not do it, I tear down my self-confidence.

Now measure the trust in other important relationships. You may tell your spouse that you will be home before 7 p.m., but you arrive an hour later. The first time that happens and even the second

time will probably not damage trust. But when you do not live out *good faith*, the price you pay is reduced confidence and broken trust.

Describe the importance of trust in the relationship between pastor and congregation.

Consider people sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. One man just lost his job, and his wife's parents are in town visiting. A single mom is wondering how she is going to pay her bills. A couple celebrating their fortieth anniversary has brought their entire family to church; many of them are searching for truth. All of these various people have confidence in your good faith to them, to pastor them, nurture them, and disciple them in love.

Explain how the idea of covenant defined the Old Testament relationship with God.

The Old Testament provides some interesting insight and guidelines for relationships. Recall that the Ark of the Covenant is a physical representation of God's presence with the people. It represents the relationship of the people with God. Inherent in this relationship is a contract—the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

The Scriptures tell us that the Ark resided in the heart of the temple, the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. It was evidence of a relationship between the two parties: God and His people. Outsiders were not permitted entry. It was an exclusive, private relationship. The Ark was surrounded by a curtain. Even the high priest was forbidden from entering except for once a year, on the special occasion of the Day of Atonement. He entered then as a messenger from the people to deliver formal repentance for their sins. Scriptures gave him strict orders to watch his step. He did not dare sneak in. He was required to approach, literally, with bells on (Exodus 28:35). He had to enter according to God's protocol.

In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, the primary focus is our relationship with God (1 John 5:20). The New Testament word picture used most often for that relationship is marriage, again a holy institution. The Ephesians' picture of submission (in chapter 5) is respect and sacrifice as the ultimate standard for healthy relationships.

Lesson 4.2 Healthy Relationships and Respect

The relationship between God and His people is not like one between adversaries, but between a father and his children. So why all the rules? They are for our protection. The Old Testament is full of stories that show how false prophets interloped, posing as go-betweens. They embezzled the confidence and trust of the people and appropriated God's authority.

Jeremiah 28 tells the story of the false prophet, Hananiah, who told the people that God would break the yoke of Babylon and return all their goods. This false word attracted the people to his leadership, but his prophecy was not true.

Later, Acts 13 tells this story of deception:

They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. (vv. 6–8)

How do we develop healthy relationships with the people who make up the church, whether sitting in the pew or in leadership and staff roles? How do we relate to so many different kinds of people? How can we respond with respect to someone who talks on and on? This person could swallow up the time we have allotted for sermon preparation or an evening with family.

The more differences we see around us, the more evidence we have of the genius of our Creator. Scientists tell us that not one snowflake is the same as another, so we would not expect God to make men and women with a cookie cutter.

Understanding Self and Others

Describe how to demonstrate respect in relationships.

Why is it essential that each individual be given appropriate respect?

Relationships are formed by *real* people. Each person is a unique mix of cultural, educational, and social background. Yet before we were born, God knew each one-of-a-kind individual. The

psalmist says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13–14).

In the same way that we can recognize a person by his or her unique features—brown eyes, curly hair, round chin, and a long nose—we also recognize what we call *personality*. In a sense, this is the way each person has been wired and then develops through the stages of life.

For church leaders and pastors, the value of understanding how people vary in personality and temperament can greatly improve relationships and the quality of pastoral care provided. The Amplified Bible’s version of 1 Timothy 4:15–16 expands on the value of understanding and developing our own personality as a basis for benefiting those we relate to. Practice and cultivate and meditate upon these duties; throw yourself wholly into them [as your ministry], so that your progress may be evident to everybody. Look well to yourself [to your own personality] and to [your] teaching; persevere in these things [hold to them], for by so doing you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

However, it is also important to understand that the effort to identify temperaments is not without pitfalls. It is recorded as far back as Hippocrates, whose “four humors theory” explained personality tendencies as a result of the body producing four humors or bodily fluids: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. He believed that an imbalance among these humors would cause physical or psychological illness. This four-fold schema—sanguine (cheerful), choleric (irritable), melancholic (depressed) and phlegmatic (unemotional)—has been foundational to several popular works on temperament types (LaHaye 1992–1993). In addition, Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent (2006) developed a variation of this personality assessment, which ties four types of personality to four animals: the lion (wants to get to the bottom line); the beaver (likes precision and planning); the golden retriever (likes togetherness and relationships); and the otter (is an eternal optimist). Also available for use are the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Meyers-Brigg Temperament Inventory (MBTI).

It is obvious that two people can look at the same circumstance with different views. Therefore, a pastor must develop a healthy respect for differences that will transform those differences into stronger relationships that better serve God’s family.

What the many attempts at describing human personality have in common is an effort to understand our differences so we can be more effective. Nevertheless, these are human efforts to explain a spiritual mystery. We cannot do a medical test and examine the location of an individual’s personality. We cannot put a person in a category and then make all of our decisions based on that classification or label.

We have to ask ourselves if it is that simple. Can a set of human-made types encompass the unlimited scope of God’s creative power? Would convenient labels invalidate the changing power of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Will we be trapped in a box forever without hope for change?

Galatians 5:22–23 assures us that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will mature in us: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These characteristics are becoming part of the way we live and interact with others. They will be perceived as our personality.

Consequently, it is safer to recognize that these models are only tools. As with all tools, it is wise to study, practice, and become an expert before wielding them. When a chisel is in the hands of an artist, the result is a work of art that can communicate where words fall short. But that same chisel in the hands of a novice can cause irreparable damage.

According to Earl Creps, the traits described by these inventories can have a powerful effect, especially since their format lends a scientific feel to the product. In a society where gifted means “better than you,” leaders have to prepare others to treat their scores as foundations for growth, not millstones around their necks. Otherwise, a score quickly becomes an inappropriate label. Someone who tests as a compliant personality, for instance, may be dissuaded from leadership aspirations. Looking beyond the label, however, this person’s gentle spirit may offer exactly the kind of servant leadership required in a certain ministry. Explain to your staff that gift scores are meant to catalyze spiritual growth. They represent potential to be explored, the promise of rewarding ministry involvement ahead.

Culture

Explain the importance of respecting culture.

Culture is the accumulated habits, attitudes, and beliefs of a group of people that define for them their general behavior and way of life; the total set of learned activities of a people. Another definition of culture gives an even broader picture: “The shared values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, institutions, and experience of a group of people. The group may be identified by race, age, ethnicity, language, national origin, religion, or other social categories or groupings” (Bureau of Justice Assistance).

How might cultural conflicts arise between generations?

Often a cultural value may be perceived as a personality trait. Just having a common language and living in a particular geographical location does not make us culturally the same. That understanding helps us develop a greater awareness and respect for differing cultures.

Some cultures within the larger people groups are based on behaviors. For instance, there is an acknowledged “drug-culture” that brings to mind the special needs of people with life-controlling dependencies. But there are other subcultures within our churches that also require sensitivity. Consider the seventy-year-old board member who has been a member of the church since it was

built. He has literally invested his own muscle as well as his earnings in this church. Language that fails to recognize his *builder* values will result in a stalemate or even open conflict in church business meetings.

The wise minister will carefully learn to communicate cross-culturally. One ingredient in respecting another's culture is to study that culture. This is something we usually relegate to the missionaries. Consider how to implement it in your day-to-day ministry.

In today's ever-closer world, we have many different practices within the local church. How does that influence how we relate to people who are different from us? As an example, we will look at how we address our leaders. When I am calling one of the older, respected leaders from another district, I might begin my conversation with a more formal address, "Brother Muller." However, when I am calling the pastor of the Chi Alpha group at the university, I'll start right off saying, "Hi Karl, this is Ray." Is one form of address better or more spiritual than the other? No, each has value within the context of that culture. Now, if Karl calls me Ray, and Brother Muller calls me Brother Rachels, is that inconsistent? Is that hypocrisy?

The concept of valuing and implementing cultural respect is modeled for us by the apostle Paul: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Personal Boundaries

Develop two strategies to respect personal boundaries.

Boundaries are a natural consequence of differentness. The concept of individuals belonging to the whole is an amazing order seen over and over in God's creation. The smallest creature is made up of individual cells. If the cell membranes (boundaries) are destroyed, the cell becomes vulnerable to bacteria that invade and destroy it.

How does this concept impact healthy relationships in the context of differentness? Obviously, individual cells belong within the whole body and carry out functions that the whole body is dependent on. Likewise, an individual cell is dependent on the rest of the body. If it is removed from the body, it will die. It cannot sustain life on its own.

Boundaries are part of who we are in the body of Christ. They provide two-way protection. When I recognize my limitations, I rein in my natural inclination to interfere in another individual's responsibilities. This is healthy. The reverse is also important; recognizing that my boundaries empower me to withstand invasion attempts.

Integrating the language of boundaries in our ministry will help in developing healthy relationships. We want to develop mature believers, effective in the body of Christ. The language of boundaries is about limitations, not restrictions. It is about honesty. The language of boundaries

is not “just say no” as a reaction to demands on your time. This must be part of your personal maturity. Without boundaries, your time will evaporate and you will find your time in prayer and the Word is lost.

Why must the church play a large role in helping people understand healthy boundaries?

You will not need to put up a sign with your boundaries. People will know very quickly what your boundaries are. For example, do you regularly affirm your commitment to keeping sermon study hours? But when someone asks to meet with you about the new carpet color and you agree, then you are saying that your boundaries are very flexible. However, this response indicates that your boundaries are established disciplines: “I have about three hours set aside this morning for sermon preparation. Is there a time we can meet this afternoon or on Thursday?”

Boundaries are the result of respect, maturity, and a life aligned with Scripture. Notice how the previous conversation validates the importance of the Word. But it does not dismiss the parishioner. It models healthy respect in relationships, and the parishioner begins the process of learning the same principles. He or she may even begin to open phone calls with similar respectful language such as, “Is this a good time for you?”

Sometimes as ministers, we may feel that *our* phone calls are priority, so we model an unhealthy assertive and possibly invasive communication style that negatively affects relationships in the church. When we are pressured for time, we must practice discipline to maintain respect in our relationships with the people we care for. A healthy communication style that evokes respect for boundaries when calling those we serve is to offer choices. To make an appointment to visit a parishioner, instead of saying, “I will stop by between five and five-thirty this afternoon,” try something gentler that empowers the parishioner, “I would like to stop by to see you today. Is five or six this afternoon good for you? If not, maybe we can arrange something on another day.”

Make respect a part of your ministry lifestyle in communication, in message, and in action. First Peter 2:17 tells us, “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.” Respect is the first building block in all forms of relationship building. And it starts with you. It means you will listen and value the thoughts and ideas of others. It means you will guard your heart from attitudes that could devalue a fellow minister. It means that you will elicit an equal respect from others.

Lesson 4.3 Boundaries that Protect

Boundaries that we put in place now will protect us from unhealthy things that can enter our ministry later. God’s Word is very clear about how we are to deal with unhealthy relationships. Stay away from them (Matthew 26:41, Proverbs 4:15)!

We are reminded of stories of admired leaders like David who made a relationship blunder (2 Samuel 11) that resulted in tragic consequences. Those consequences were not just to him, but also to many others. The cost is high when we neglect personal responsibility in maintaining boundaries in all areas of our lives.

The purpose of a fence is either to keep out or keep in. There are difficult people in our ministry that we must be prepared to respond to. Sometimes that response means being alert to danger and being prepared to avoid it.

Avoiding Relational Vices

Strife

Describe the long-term effects of relational vices.

Why should we avoid words of strife?

“It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel!” (Proverbs 20:3). Perhaps the greatest equalizer for humankind is time. We all get twenty-four hours a day—no more, no less. We cannot put an extra hour we did not use today in the bank and save it for a rainy day. We also cannot recall an hour wasted in an argument. It is easy to think of the many reasons to avoid strife. For example, we cannot unsay harsh words. The wounds may heal, but the scars are reminders of a broken trust and the first brick in a wall. In other cases, no amount of argument will change anything, and the minister’s time is swallowed up in empty efforts. The insistent clamor of the quarrelsome voice may literally steal time and energy from a quieter or weaker voice. Be careful of relationships that are full of strife.

Gossip and Other Vices

Proverbs 20:19 gives a clear warning: “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.” Relationships with gossips are destructive, and the destruction is two-fold. First,

the gossip may destroy the reputation and life of the person being talked about. Second, it destroys the hearer. Some folks excuse themselves by saying, “I just wanted to better understand so that I can pray with more understanding.” But the fact is that gossip feeds something ugly in our spirits. When there is news of someone’s error, it is too easy to become filled with pride as we look down from our high position. That is a dangerous place to be.

Why should you avoid relationships with those who gossip?

Stay away from relationships that consume time with too much talking about others. You can be sure that you will lower your guard, and then your secrets will become chaff on the wind. For guidance in building healthy relationships, follow Proverbs 4:14: “Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.” We are *in* the world and not *of* the world (John 17:14–16). The Scriptures remain the standard to guard us against questionable relationships.

Why is friendship with those in the world a difficult balance for the Christian?

When we engage the evil of this world and call individuals to repentance, we stand before them. In a Christlike model, this calls for a relationship built on compassion, not condemnation. In Matthew 28:19 we are admonished to “make disciples.” That means that on our path, not their path, we are to lead and teach those who would become His followers.

Healthy relationships mirror the relationship we have in Christ. We experience a friendship that is closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24), a respect that has no room for condemnation, and a maturity that has room for others. Whether people are difficult or just different, building relationship is an integral aspect of the minister’s calling.

Lesson 4.4 Different or Disagreeable

A fable is told of a careless old hen in a farmer’s barnyard. Accidentally she stepped on a duck’s foot. It did not hurt the duck, but the duck got peeved and said, “I will pay you for that!”

The duck flew at the old hen, but as he did so, his wings struck an old goose that was standing near. The old goose became angry, thinking it was done on purpose. He said to the duck, “I will

pay you for that!” And with that he flew at the duck. As he did so, his foot tore the fur of a cat who was taking a sunbath.

“I will pay you for that!” hissed the cat as she started for the goose. But as she jumped, her foot struck a ram. “I will pay you for that!” bleated the ram as he made a dash for the cat. Just then a dog ran that way, and the ram ran over the dog.

“I will pay you for that!” barked the dog, and ran pell-mell after the ram. He ran so fast that he could not avoid the cow standing by the gate, and he collided with her. “I will pay you for that!” bellowed the cow as she started after the dog. The dog ran behind a horse, and the cow scratched the horse with her horns. “I will pay you for that!” neighed the horse as he rushed at the cow. What a tumult there was—all because the hen had accidentally stepped on the duck’s toes.

The above illustration mirrors human behavior. Often, people with no reverse gear can create chaos! I heard recently of a man who drove his Volkswagen New Beetle off a car lot, away from the dealership, without benefit of any instructions concerning its operation. But he was an experienced driver and figured that his knowledge was enough.

At lunch time he pulled up to a restaurant, turned off the ignition, and went inside. After lunch, he got into his new car, tried to back up, and then discovered that he could not find the reverse gear. Finally, in desperation, he pushed the car into the street so that he would not have to use the reverse gear.

While some people would not think of buying a car without a reverse gear, they try to conduct human relations without the willingness to back up or use reverse gear for the sake of others. Marriages break up, friendships are severed, and churches fall apart simply because stubborn people will not back up. We dig our feet into the ground and refuse to say things like “I was wrong,” or “I am sorry,” or “It is my fault,” or “Let us back up and start over.”

The Bible warns of destructive behavior traits like stubbornness and pride: “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). We need a reverse gear in our relationships as much as we need it in our cars.

Dealing with Disagreements

Identify concepts to remember when faced with disagreements.

Disagreements touch all of us from time to time. The hard part is in keeping disagreeableness and a disagreeable spirit out of any equation where solutions are sought in bridging gaps between people who differ. Here are a few thoughts that may help.

Keep Perspective.

Why can disagreements in the church cause people to easily lose perspective?

Do not reject, ostracize, or push away another person just because he or she has a different opinion. Wisdom is found through a multitude of counselors and from opinions where there are appropriate alternative choices.

Remember to keep a disagreement properly focused. Do not transfer the disagreement to other areas. Do not generalize. The church is most attractive to the world not when we are monotonously uniform, but when we function as the body of Christ where one is the eye, another is the hand, another is the foot, and so forth. The observing world is not impressed by a believer's cookie cutter approach to issues; that is, every person acting and speaking in the same way, but rather by our agreement to cooperate with and complement each other.

Uphold the Other Person's Integrity.

Be sure that you are on solid ground if you choose to question the motive of the person with whom you disagree. When or if you assume the right of challenging another's motive, you must give the person the same right. Remember that it is not sin to have personal differences. Many differences stem from cultural, intellectual, and doctrinal diversity. Therefore, compromise in many instances of disagreement is necessary. Compromise is not sin as long as it does not destroy morals or basic doctrines.

Remember the Golden Rule.

It is not evasive to say to another person, "I must do what I consider to be right, but I will respect you for doing what you believe to be right." Such an idea models Christian grace.

Disagreements Are Not New Among Christians.

We need to be reminded of the controversies and awkward relationships of Apostle Paul (Acts 15). May the Lord help us to keep the unique spiritual tension that connects the divine and the human. May we leave disagreements among God's people to the working of God's grace. And may the quality of our relationships among each other be above reproach and evident to the world for the sake of bringing glory and honor to Christ's eternal kingdom.⁵

⁵ T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 52–60.

Unit 2 The Minister and the Church

When we read Paul’s letter to the church he founded at Philippi, we think of the predominant theme—joy. After all, Paul, in the four short chapters of this book, makes over a dozen references to “joy” and “rejoicing.” It is also in this book that we have encouraging messages such as: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” and “My God will meet all your needs” (Philippians 4:13, 19).

However, tucked away in this little thank you letter are two acknowledgments that everything is not perfect in this early church fellowship. Difficulties and conflicts between people are present from the beginning. This may be disconcerting to those who have forgotten that even Christians are fallen creatures in need of God’s grace. Yet, this is the same fellowship that God used to send help to suffering Christians in Jerusalem and to assist Paul.

A farmer came into town and asked a restaurant owner if he could use a thousand frog legs. The owner was already considering adding frog legs to his menu, so he was curious as to how the farmer could get that many. The farmer said, “Well, that is not going to be very hard. I have a pond on my farm that is literally overflowing with frogs. Their croaking is driving me crazy, and if you can use a thousand legs, they are yours.”

They made a financial agreement and the farmer went back to his farm. A week later, the farmer went to the restaurant owner with a sheepish grin on his face and two scrawny frogs in a box. “I was wrong about having five hundred frogs,” the farmer confessed. “These two little frogs were all I could find; they made all the noise by themselves.

Two of the great challenges we have in the church today are finding ways to handle the frogs (difficult, noisy people) in the pond and finding ways to make good music out of their noise. This unit will consider the minister’s relationship with all individuals who make up the local church: staff members, church leaders, and congregants. How can a minister build a healthy church with healthy relationships among leaders? How can the minister respond in healthy and mature ways to challenges in church relationships? The key lies in acknowledging the design of the body of Christ: “In Christ’s body, we are all connected to each other” (Ephesians 4:25, *The Message Bible*).

Chapter 5 Relationships in the Church

Lessons

C5.1 Great Expectations

C5.2 Wisdom for Relationships

Chapter 6 Preaching to Connect

Lessons

- C6.1 Practical Principles for Pulpit Ministry
- C6.2 Self-Doubt and Feelings of Failure
- C6.3 Preaching Trends and Traps

Chapter 7 Ministry Relationship Challenges

Lessons

- C7.1 Responding to Ministry Challenges
- C7.2 The Art of Forgiveness
- C7.3 The Process of Forgiving

Chapter 8 Building Trust in Ministry

Lessons

- C8.1 Accountability
- C8.2 The Church Board
- C8.3 The Process of Change
- C8.4 Managing Your Time

Chapter 5 Relationships in the Church

In our postmodern world, people both inside and outside of the church are daily clamoring for the acceptance of others. Social scientists confirm our suspicions about the prevalence of loneliness in postmodern life: approximately one-fourth of all adults suffer from loneliness. These people just want someone to care. Hence, our churches ought to be the best place to fill these needs; pastors need to teach their people to develop eyes of compassion.

Lonely people will not be drawn to and remain in our churches unless our own relationships are healthy. Someone has said that approximately 44 percent of the New Testament's epistles contain instructions for how Christians are to get along with each other. Confirm this yourself; see how many times the words *one another* appear in the New Testament. The foundation for all of our relationships should be Christ's relationship with His church. Romans 15:7 says this: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

A church that brings praise to God is one where Christian love is modeled within pastor-church relationships, and where neither pastors nor congregants desire to control or manipulate the other. No doubt, what we desire is that all relationships between the senior pastor, associate pastors, staff, lay leaders, and congregants demonstrate profound love and esteem for each other. To achieve a Christlike caring among your people, you must model the behavior yourself. Make relationship-building a focus of your sermons; talk about it in your daily one-on-one conversations and in any

speaking opportunity you have. Encourage your leaders to spread the relationship-building message; soon the people will notice and follow your lead. Then the unchurched will be attracted to your services. Let us reaffirm the power, value, and meaning of living together as the family of God.

Lesson 5.1 Great Expectations

Objectives

5.1.1 *Explain why expectations must be clearly communicated.*

5.1.2 *Identify the expectations of laypersons.*

Lesson 5.2 Wisdom for Relationships

Objectives

5.2.1 *List three of your limitations.*

5.2.2 *Identify proverbs that give instructions on interpersonal relations.*

Lesson 5.1 Great Expectations

I love the story of the old Pennsylvania apple grower who was asked what he thought heaven would be like. “I do not know,” he said, “but I sure hope I find trees on the other side of those pearly gates. I do not want golden streets where the sun never sets. Not me! I want sunsets, green meadows, October frosts, and January icicles, with a few March gales thrown in for good measure. It takes all of these to give an apple just the right flavor.”

In the same way, the flavor of a church is a result of many factors. In an age when ideas of leadership have captured the church scene, it is important for pastors to be relationally attuned to and skilled in working with people. Relationships are vital for the health of both minister and church.

A Common Vision

Explain why expectations must be clearly communicated.

Why must expectations be made clear in communicating vision?

A key component in relationships is expectations, and communicating expectations often requires a clear vision that everyone understands. One way to communicate vision is to write your beliefs and purpose. Write a credo, a mission statement, that will be a behavioral guide for every person in the church's circle of leadership: custodians, ushers, teachers, board members, associate pastors, senior pastor, and all others. Be specific and honest. Whatever success or failure you may have as pastor should tap into that credo/mission statement as the values that will be applied by every team member and to every ministry in your local church, no matter how small it may seem. Your effectiveness as a leader will likely come only to the degree that you are able to communicate to the people so that they take those beliefs and purpose as their own.

Thomas Watson, Jr., was president and chief executive officer of International Business Machines from 1952 to 1971. He built the incredible success of IBM on three basic principles: respect for the individual, the best possible service to the customer, and the pursuit of excellence in the quality of products (Watson, n.d). This three-fold business philosophy still in force at IBM is an effective model that should inspire our ministries.

A pastor once called the church's leadership together, asking that they spend a few weeks establishing core values for their congregation. The entire church community took up the task, met in focus groups, and talked out the principles of Spirit-led ministry. Their conclusions follow.

Basis of Spirit-Led Ministry

The Bible

Why is the Bible the ideal source for a consistent standard?

The Bible is the foundation. Our church has always taken the Scriptures seriously. God's Word, not human tradition, is to be the only rule for faith and life. At our church, this continues to be the bedrock for ministry, a core commitment that must permeate our life together. We will stand unashamedly together on God's Word. We believe that spiritual seekers want to know what God says, and we intend to tell them. This means that teaching and learning from the Bible will shape not only our Sunday worship, but also our small group ministries, our youth programs, and our vision for discipleship. We intend to produce Christians knowledgeable in the Word.

Prayer

Prayer is imperative. All Christians believe in prayer. But at our church, we believe prayer is not just a program, but rather a way of life. Prayer is the air we breathe; it is the atmosphere in which we will live and move and have our ministry. Prayer is the way we live before the face of God, the way in which Jesus will direct our ministries, and the way in which the Spirit of God will empower our otherwise feeble efforts. We desire to be a spiritual community, not a religious theme park. We desire to produce Christians who understand and practice the spiritual disciplines.

The Lost

With whom did Jesus spend most of His time?

Lost people matter to God and to God's people. The heart of the biblical story is God's desire to rescue lost humanity (Luke 19:10). Jesus spent most of His time not within the religious establishment but with ordinary people, including the poor, the sinful, the weak, and the broken. At our church, we want to share God's heart for the lost. We realize that all Christians say they believe in evangelism; we want to do evangelism. This means that ministry decisions will place the needs of the lost ahead of the comfort of the saints. This means that part of the discipleship process will be to become a reproducing Christian. Because the commitment to seek the lost is a core value, we expect to be not only a growing church but also a sending church. We desire to participate in the worldwide mission of God and to produce a new generation of Christian leaders.

Safe Place

Church is a safe place to be. Even though God hates sin, He loves sinners. And He is incredibly patient with us. We want to reflect God's patience and the spirit of acceptance that we see in Jesus' ministry. Here people will be free to share their stories, and leaders will model vulnerability and authenticity. We want to be honest about brokenness so that God can make this a place of healing. We will start with where people are and grow from there. We aim to be a church where everyone has access, including people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, persons with disabilities, and people with no previous church background.

Worship is an encounter with God. All churches offer worship services. At our church we want to go beyond the rituals. We self-consciously try to create worship experiences that help people meet Jesus personally. Discipleship includes cultivating the capacity to engage with God in worship. Even first-time guests should sense that they are standing on holy ground.

Meaningful Relationships

Why do we include worship experiences in church services?

Spiritual formation happens best in the context of meaningful relationships. The Christian faith is not just about me and Jesus. God builds community. Even the best of us cannot experience optimal growth unless we are engaged, encouraged, and accountable in community. Therefore small groups are central to our ministry strategy, the infrastructure for discipleship and care-giving in the community of faith.

Kids Count

What are two aspects of ministry to children?

Kids count. Our church has always stressed the covenant obligation to pass the faith on to the next generation. Here we see youth not only as the recipients of ministry, but also as partners in ministry. Children and young people are not just the church of the future; they are the church of today. We want them to lead us and teach us, even as we wish them to be teachable.

The Calling

Ministry is the calling of every believer. Life becomes meaningful when we find a place of service. We may make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. And God has made a way for every believer to invest in His cause by using the spiritual gifts He provides. We intend to help all believers discover their spiritual gifts and find the place where God is calling them to ministry.

Stewardship

Stewardship is a way of living, not only a way of giving. All of life is God's. Our calling is to manage life for the Master. A mature Christian is one who sees all of life in relationship to the Lord and puts God first in the management of time, money, relationships, leisure, and daily work. We desire to produce disciples who have an integrated, holistic, Christian worldview. Our ministry dreams cannot be achieved without people whose hearts are generous toward God.

Expectations of Laypersons

Identify the expectations of laypersons.

Brother Smith called the pastor's office early one Monday morning. When there was no answer he left this message, "Pastor, why are you not there to answer the phone? This is a business day. I called because I wanted to talk to you about two things. First, your sermon yesterday was too long and people felt really convicted. You need to be nicer from the pulpit. Second, I think you are looking too tired and you need to get more rest. Then you will do a better job." As Brother Smith hung up, there was a smile on his face, assured that he had done his duty to help the pastor do a better job.

An hour later, the pastor stopped by his office to pick up his jacket; his wife waited in the car. She knew if she went in he would stay longer and then their day off would be lost. When he saw the red signal on his phone he decided it was best to take a few minutes to check the messages. By this time there were two more. Sister Jones had called to tell him that the message Sunday was wonderful and she was still thinking about the challenges. She also wanted to remind him that she and two other women were planning to bring some new carpet samples for him to see as they did not like the color the board had chosen and wanted to prevent a costly mistake. The last message was from his wife, "Honey, I am waiting in the car."

There will be days like that for you too. From time to time, pastors have expressed their concern that people have very unreal expectations for them. But in reality, most of the people in the church have reasonable expectations. I know a well-respected minister and leader in another denomination who first focused the following ideas for me. Through the years, I have watched key laypersons and have come to understand what some of their expectations are for their ministers. This list is a result of those observations. I believe they are biblical and practical.

Spiritual Integrity

How can others tell whether or not we have spiritual integrity?

People expect the minister to have spiritual integrity. They want a pastor who is in touch with God, whose priorities in personal and professional life are spiritual, and who courageously articulates these through planning and preaching. One layperson said to me, "I need to know that my pastor has an intact spiritual life and is deeply acquainted with God." The minister's life should line up with his or her message, spoken and lived.

Moral Soundness

People expect the minister to have moral soundness. If there is spiritual integrity, then moral soundness follows. However, the religious community is shocked from time to time to realize that some people make a distinction between the two. Laypersons put a high premium on the moral

soundness of their pastor, for they see their pastor as a model, not only to them but to their children, for their moral lives.

Initiative

How can a minister demonstrate initiative?

People expect the minister to have initiative—to be a self-starter, someone who is not lazy but who applies energy to the task at hand, someone who does not need to be prodded by others to get going. Most people work and live in a world monitored by the clock and by other accountability factors. They need the assurance that their pastor is also professionally giving 100 percent.

Competence

In what ways do secular professionals maintain their professional competence?

The people expect the minister to have competence. Laypersons know they are only hired for jobs they are qualified for by education and training. They know that they must be able to do the job for which they are paid or look elsewhere. Pastors must know how to pastor, to do the tasks of pastoring. One of the frustrations I sense in laypersons is that they too often see incompetence in their pastor.

Commitment

The minister must be committed to the task. Laypersons need to know that their pastor is deeply committed to the job, to the calling, and to the church. They need to know that the pastor cares deeply. A layperson recently said to me, “We are not sure our pastor cares either about us or the church, and he is my good friend.” I felt the pain of the layperson’s admission.

Intelligence

Laypersons expect their pastor to be intelligent, not a genius but someone with a questing, alive mind. They want their pastor to keep his or her brain active. They want a mind that can deliver something fresh, relevant, life-related and challenging. They expect their pastor to read, study, generate ideas, and stay on the growing edge.

Financial Honesty

People expect the minister to have financial honesty. Laypersons expect their pastor to know how to handle finances, to keep bills paid, honor commitments, and live within his or her means. These are not unfair expectations.

Organization

Laypersons expect their pastor to be organized, to be able to administrate in such a way that things get done. One of the greatest weaknesses among pastors is in time-management skills.

Needs-Related Preaching

The people expect the minister to provide good, needs-related preaching. Today, when so much competes with the Sunday worship time, this has growing importance. A solid biblical foundation is the best foundation for relationships between the people and the pastor. The minister is admonished to study. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Vision

The people expect the minister to have a vision. Laypersons expect their pastor to cast vision and to plan, to generate the framework wherein the future of the church can unfold. They need to know what exciting things are on the drawing board. The Bible says that without a vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18).

Lesson 5.2 Wisdom for Relationships

Yes, you know what to expect of the people, and you have a better idea of what they expect from you. But there are situations that leave us feeling defensive. I am reminded of Nehemiah’s team of rebuilders. Their posture is a good model for us who are called on to go into circumstances where we find the rubble of broken walls and crumbling relationships. “Those who carried material did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked” (Nehemiah 4:17–18). There are times of weakness where we may be tempted to forget our values and lay down our weapons. As ministers, relentless demands call for wisdom to be our constant companion. Many times a week we must pray, “God, help me.”

Wisdom and Limits

List three of your limitations.

Describe three of your own limitations in ministry.

Wisdom often means knowing our own limitations. Pride might lead us to set ourselves above others, and we may not want to risk being looked down on.

The Manager's Intelligence Report magazine suggested that if you gathered one hundred experienced managers and asked for their advice, they probably would not say much about competing values models or temporal rhythms. Instead what you would likely hear in broad terms are the following recommendations:

1. Do not be afraid to admit "I do not know." If you do not know the answer, do not try to bluff. If you are at fault, take the blame. If you are wrong, apologize. Pastors are always on the spot to give answers to questions. If you do not know the answer, do not give one.
2. Never gossip. And if someone wants to gossip with you, politely say you are not interested. This corporate adage rings true: when someone gossips, two reputations are hurt—the person being talked about and the person doing the talking. Pastor, you can be absolutely sure of one thing—you will be quoted!
3. No task is beneath you. Do not think you are above doing hard work. Be a good example and pitch in—especially if the job is one that nobody wants to do. One board member told me that when he saw his pastor on a Saturday with the rest of the church people, with his jeans and work shirt on, he knew this pastor was one of quality.
4. Share the credit whenever possible. People who spread credit around look much stronger than people who take all the credit for themselves. A youth pastor told me his motivation for helping his senior pastor was at a low point because his ideas were always taken, used, and then he never received credit privately or publicly. "If he would just throw me a bone once in a while," he anguished.
5. Ask for help. If you think you are in over your head, you probably are. Before a task gets out-of-hand, ask someone for help—most people enjoy being useful. Besides saving yourself from embarrassment, you will make a friend and an ally. In every congregation there sits an incredible army, even an army of one, waiting to respond to your call. Call them; they will come!
6. Keep your salary to yourself. Discussing salary is a no-win proposition. Either you will be upset because someone is making more than you, or someone will be upset with you. Boasting and or lamenting about money spoils the spirit and holds the power to sour your friendships.

7. When you do not like someone, do not let it show especially if you outrank them. Never burn bridges or offend others as you go forward. Pastors have a powerful platform of influence. Use it to bless, encourage, and promote peace. The Philippians 4:8 principle always works. “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”
8. Let it go. What should not happen often does: you are not given the place you wanted; you are passed over. Be gracious and diplomatic and move on. Holding a grudge will keep you from moving forward. Bitterness can hang on a long time and eat away your insides. And as Christian writer, Frederick Buechner says, “The skeleton at that feast is always you” (1973, 2).
9. When you are right, do not gloat. The only time you should ever use the phrase, “I told you so,” is if someone says to you: “You are right. I really was able to do what you said I could do.”

Principles from Proverbs

Identify Proverbs that give instructions on interpersonal relations.

The Bible records many examples of conflict. No matter what leader was involved, King David or one of the disciples, the Scriptures never condone or overlook the issue of interpersonal strife. Principles for healthy relationships are taught in the Old and New Testaments. Following is a snapshot review of the instruction on interpersonal relations given to us in Proverbs.

- To hold our tongues and avoid slander (Proverbs 10:18–19)
- To tell the truth (Proverbs 16:13)
- To speak gently (Proverbs 15:1)
- To think before we talk (Proverbs 18:13)
- To listen carefully (Proverbs 19:20)
- To resist temptation to gossip (Proverbs 16:28)
- To avoid flattery (Proverbs 7:21)
- To trust God (Proverbs 3:5)⁶

⁶ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 65–72.

Chapter 6 Preaching to Connect

You can be Pentecostal and culturally relevant at the same time. We can turn people on, not off, by removing distractions that keep them from finding the real message of the church.

The message of the gospel is too important to be hindered by thoughtless or careless ways of bringing it to our congregation. For instance, is it spiritually wise to complicate a person's search for the kingdom of God by obscuring it with language, methods, or behavior that makes it difficult for him or her to find that real message? The gospel is indeed confrontational, but it is also healing and winsome.

Sometimes our explanations of things and situations are unclear. Here is a humorous explanation of baseball given to a grandmother by her grandson: "You have two sides, one out in the field and one in. Each man that's on the side that's in goes out and when he's out he comes in and the next man goes in until he's out. When three men are out, the side that is out comes in and the side that has been in goes out and tries to get those coming in out. When both sides have been in and out nine times, including the not outs, that's the end of the game."

This confusing description of baseball is nearly impossible to comprehend. It would probably not draw any new fans to the sport. In the same way, if our preaching and teaching is not clear and compelling, then we have not communicated the simple truth of the gospel message.

Lesson 6.1 Practical Principles for Pulpit Ministry

Objective

6.1.1 *Discuss the professional responsibilities of those in pulpit ministry.*

Lesson 6.2 Self-Doubt and Feelings of Failure

Objective

6.2.1 *Indicate how ministers can manage insecurity and the threat of failure.*

Lesson 6.3 Preaching Trends and Traps

Objectives

6.3.1 *Point out cautions about using humor in your message.*

6.3.2 *Discuss ways a preacher can abuse position.*

Lesson 6.1 Practical Principles for Pulpit Ministry

Following is advice on helping church leaders make their message more people-centered and attractive.

The Pulpit and the People

Modesty

Discuss the professional responsibilities of those in pulpit ministry.

Getting and keeping a balance on appropriate dress, speech, and behavior should not be difficult for people in ministry. Following an era of religious glitz and glamour, it would seem that a more culturally modest presentation of the church is appropriate for our communities. The great message of our Lord is most winsomely told by humble and self-effacing voices. To take away from the gospel's wholeness by inappropriate excess creates unnecessary distraction for an already cynical outside world. That world is often wanting and willing to believe, but is turned off by lifestyles that strut an unbiblical discord with the humble expectation Jesus has for His church.

Brevity

The hardest single hurdle for any public speaker is to convey the message in a few words. But those who learn that skill become favorites. Consider this parable. On the island of *Brevity*, the people said what they had to say in as few words as possible and expected everyone else to do the same.

One year, famine struck the neighboring island of Ontoolong, and the people sent a representative to Brevity to ask for help. When he arrived, he launched into a description of the havoc being wrought by the famine, the suffering of the Ontoolong people, and the implications that the disaster had for all islanders in the area.

He spoke for nearly two hours and many in the Brevity delegation fell asleep. When he finally finished, the leader of the Brevity group said that he could not remember the beginning of the speech and many of the details that followed. The Ontoolong speaker returned empty-handed with a request that someone else be sent to explain the situation. Ontoolong immediately sent a new speaker to ask for help. He was instructed to be brief.

He stood before the governing body of Brevity, holding empty rice bags in his hands and spoke only three sentences: "My people are starving. These bags are empty. Please fill them." Then he sat down. The head of the Brevity governing body immediately ordered the bags filled and then

took the representative aside and said, “There was no need to point out that the bags were empty; we could see that. And it was not necessary to ask us to fill them; we would have done that anyway. If you come again, remember do not talk so much.”

People whose major role in life seems to be talking should strike a balance for the benefit of the hearers. It takes practice to be brief enough to get a point across effectively and wise enough not to go on too long. It also takes a great deal of skillful study to craft a message that is clear and concise. But when the listener understands, responds, and remembers, then it is well worth the effort.

Most Christians recognize when it is time to close. If you know you have prepared a long message and must have extra preaching time, cut back on another component of the worship service to give yourself the time you need. But if you are consistently wordy and go overtime, you will decrease your effectiveness.

Inspiration

Inspire people to acknowledge the presence of God in their lives. Do it wisely. Be careful about thoughtlessly asking guests to remain standing for great lengths of time, while choruses and songs are being sung by the regular churchgoers.

I believe the richest spiritual power flows through the Scriptures. It takes on life as the Holy Spirit anoints it and the servant-pastor conveys its quality. Music heightens it to the soul. Exhortation drives it home. Testimonies amplify it. Congregations embrace it. When the preacher’s heart is on fire with it, the reaction will be conviction and self-examination (Isaiah 6:5). Bring holy life to cold, dull, ritual. Awaken people to the Living Word.

What types of topics should the minister avoid and why?

Most people come to church from the secular workplace, where daily they face an unChristian mind-set. Preachers often live a cocooned life, talking to Christians about other Christians, and all too often ignoring the gut issues which affect most people. Do not get trapped into talking only about your pet peeve or ideas that are not relevant to your congregation. Inspire confidence in your spiritual integrity by identifying the Word of God with the real concerns of the congregation.

P. T. Forsyth wrote:

It is into the Bible world of the eternal redemption, that the preacher must bring his people ... To every age it is equally near, and it is equally authoritative for every age, however modern... The only preaching which is up to date for every time is the preaching of this eternity, which is opened to us in the Bible alone—the eternal of holy love, grace and redemption, the eternal and immutable morality of saving grace for our indelible sin. (Forsyth 1907, 32–33)

Friendliness

How can the minister affect the atmosphere of the congregation?

Most smiles are started by another smile. Do not let any person get in and out of your church without being warmly received. Any time someone encounters the joyful spirit of some soul who seems genuinely happy, even if other things are less than best, that person will likely leave inspired and motivated to return to the place where joy was expressed.

At my daughter's grade school open house, I saw a poster in the main hall that read, "Be nice today. You have nothing to lose except the miserable fun of being a grump." Keep your spirit in tune with your calling as a motivator of Christ-filled living.

Be personally available after you preach. People want to connect with you, hear your personal encouragement, and feel your spirit. Love the people enough to help them overcome a moment, possibly that very moment, of discouragement by your affirmation and encouragement. Do not hide out in your office when people have been waiting all week to see you. That is why you are there. Be an encourager.

Preparation

In what way does our study affirm the value of Scripture?

Pre-think your preaching; get it in order before you stand up. It will not hinder the inspiration. People come for your message. Do not disappoint them. Many come from a week filled with society's predisposition against the church. Turn that perception around by your preaching readiness and by always having a word from the Lord.

Peter speaks of readiness in 1 Peter 3:15–16: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

Gentleness and respect are not always our first reaction when someone questions us, especially on a topic we feel passionately about. But those are exactly the qualities that we are to have. When our answer is quick and spontaneous, it is often unformulated and lacks gentleness and respect. Then, we regret our hasty response and abrupt tone.

Occasionally, you can get away with poor preparation but not often, and there is no pain like the pulpit-pain of one whose brain seems to shut down in mid-sermon because of poor preparation the previous week. It cannot produce gems of wisdom that are not there.

On the other hand, high spiritual drama and great preaching come from one whose mind and heart have been searching, reading, writing, thinking, praying, and getting ready for the pulpit moment when he or she finally says on Sunday, “It is time for the message; please open your Bibles, to our text.” You are full, overflowing, and ready! What a blessing for your congregation. By careful preparation through the week you have the chance to find the right words to ignite and inspire your audience.

Be known as a Bible-centered preacher. Always refer people to the living Word. Quote it. Tell its stories. Interpret it. Read it. Tell its truth. Show how it relates to the person on the street. They will come again and again to hear you. Those inquisitive Athenians told Paul, “We want to hear you again on this subject” (Acts 17:32).

An old saying goes like this: If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything you look at looks like a nail. It takes a full tool box to build a house or fix a car. The same is true with a sermon. Paul urged Titus to set an example by doing what is good. “In your teaching (and preaching) show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us (Titus 2:7–8).

Illustrations

Why do illustrations make teaching more effective?

A good story has great power. It will drive home your point. Have you noticed the quickened attention when you tell a good story? Here is a simple insight I heard recently of a pastor illustrating the subject of personal holiness. He gave a brief history of India’s Gandhi then quoted a reporter’s question to Gandhi during his imprisonment: “What is your message, Mr. Gandhi?” “My life is my message!” answered the reformer. You could hardly miss the point.

Jesus’ most profound teaching centered on His stories. When He wanted to show what the kingdom of heaven was like, He said it was like

- a man who sowed good seed in his field (Matthew 13:24).
- a mustard seed (13:31).
- a treasure hidden in a field (13:44).
- a merchant looking for fine pearls (13:45).
- yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour (13:33).
- a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish (13:47).

In your attempt at deep truth, do not forget to open the windows! Jesus opened them.

Evangelism

Describe what is meant by building a church atmosphere where it is safe to bring the unsaved.

Management expert Peter Drucker told a business audience, “Keep your eye on the task, not on yourself. The task matters, and you are a servant.” The greatest question confronting all of us centers on reaching the lost. Are you actively fulfilling your evangelistic mission? How many souls, realistically, do you want to see won to our Lord this year? By you personally? By your church? A minister friend recently made a terrible indictment when he declared, “There are so few of our pastors who personally plan to reach the lost.”

We must build a church atmosphere where it is safe to bring the unsaved. It should be a place where a member can count on his or her church being friendly and on the pastor being well-prepared to deliver a bold and meaningful message from God’s Word.

A lay worker reported that he had been working and witnessing to his friend and finally got him to come to church. At altar time, he went to his pastor and said, “I have brought my friend to church and believe he is ready to accept Christ. Will you come and pray with him?” The pastor flushed, began to stutter, and then pointed to a man on the other side of the church. “Go and ask [him], he is good at that sort of thing.”

It is a desperate moment for the church. We must revive our passion for reaching and winning lost people. Is our greatest weakness today timidity in evangelism? Do we feed sheep today more to fatten their seminar-seeking souls and appease their appetites to be blessed, rather than create in them a disciplined and lean spirit to assume the burden to bring in other sheep? We must get outside ourselves and into the nerve center of God’s call.

Lesson 6.2 Self-Doubt and Feelings of Failure

People are not usually drawn to negative personalities, but they are drawn to all things positive and upbeat. We all have a great appetite, even craving, for something positive, not just shiny on the outside, but good all the way through.

How do you handle those times when feelings of inadequacy overwhelm you? How do you deal with self-doubt and anguish? You have tried to do your best only to cross the finish line hobbling, knowing that you did not make it. People expected more, but there you are, dead last. All of us have known the so-called thrill of victory and agony of defeat.

Here is an example. There you are gripping the podium, tight knuckles and a buzzing in your head. You are unable to think logically. You discover that what you have planned to say, what you worked hard to say, and what you believed you could say, is not coming through. Your mind is not processing the material for your tongue in the way you intended. You talk, but the punch is missing. Your points are fuzzy, the story you thought was terrific is stale. For some unknown reason you cannot tell it right. You perspire. You pray as you speak, but nothing is working.

Does that scene fit anything you have ever felt? I have been on both sides of that scenario. I have had the perspective of the person sitting on the pew, listening to a pastor who is beating the air with great fervency, and I have had the perspective of the pastor in the pulpit, beating the air myself and praying for a quick, merciful end.

When it happens to you, there is the fateful tendency to believe that it happens only to you. You imagine that other people are too smart, too articulate, too spiritual and, for goodness sake, too well-loved by God to fail in this way. You may be tempted to think that your struggle just proved what you feared all along—you should have gone into some other profession instead. Avoid the temptation to compare yourself to someone else, perhaps a national leader, or the pastor in the next community.

What can be done to minimize the chances of failing when you preach? We ask ourselves this question not because of our own pride, but because we desire to nurture and enrich listeners with our preaching. Take time to remind yourself of your purpose. Consider the following discussion.

Getting a Handle on Negativity

Representing God

Indicate how ministers can manage insecurity and the threat of failure.

Explain how you feel about representing God to your generation.

Remember You Are Representing the Lord, Almighty God, Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

If you were speaking on behalf of a business, perhaps your concern with how this makes you feel might be better justified. But when you stand before congregants to speak the message of God,

whether in eloquence or in verbal despair, you are pointing people toward eternity. Your message carries more power than any delivery mishap you may have.

David Larsen, a professor of Homiletics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes: “We cannot represent God if we have not stood before God. It is more important for me therefore to teach a student to pray than to preach” (Larsen 1989, 53–54).

People

Remember that Your Audience Is Human Too.

We feel that our humanness is somehow different from someone else’s. Not so. God has put the same qualities that are inherent in you into people in the pew. They are like you, but the differences are in outlook and perspective. You can therefore bring your own fresh perspective to a waiting audience.

Consider what people think and talk about, what they read in the newspapers and watch on television. If your preaching is going to be relevant and meaningful, then your examples cannot all be two thousand years old.

People Are Eager to Learn from You.

The people who are there to hear you preach have a basic goodness. Believe that. Any supposed predisposition against you and/or your message is usually in your mind only, rather than theirs. Trust the fact that people have come to hear you. They could have gone somewhere else or nowhere at all, but they did not. They are sitting before you now.

Prepared

You Can Diminish Your Failure Potential by Preparing Before You Speak.

What is the relationship between preparedness and confidence?

Having something good to say depends on reading as widely as possible, thinking through your text, its accompanying points, and allowing time for the material to settle in your mind. Several years ago, the renowned comedian Bob Hope was asked the secret to his long-standing success. His answer: “Material has a lot to do with it” (*Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 2003). When you are well prepared and your mind and heart are full of information, it is much easier for your faltering tongue to tap into that reservoir on quick notice than if only a hollow spot is there. Having something to say always depends on exactly that: you must have something to say.

Being

People Love You as Much for What They Know You to be as for What You Say.

The ministry is more than the pulpit. It is loving and caring for the needs of people. It is wisely counseling people toward wholeness. It is a smile, a touch, and an honest heart at work daily among the people. It is being there when people are hurting. Do not forget that you are that kind of pastor! The people will remember. A little shouting can be effective occasionally, but people respond the best when we speak the truth in a loving manner. Solomon's wisdom tells us this: "Pleasant words promote instruction" (Proverbs 16:21).

A person who has a sermon collapse can, after a process of regrouping, come back that evening or the next week and renew his or her confidence by preaching an effective message. People appreciate seeing a good pastor rebound.

Self-Criticism

It Was Probably Not as Bad as You Thought.

We are our own worst critics. That is not a bad thing because it drives us toward being the best we can be. When we are self-conscious though, it can sometimes lead to becoming self-focused. Do not let your personal demands for perfection force you to an unhealthy sense of loss. You may not have preached a world-class message, but if you spoke the truth, gave it in humility, and had the backing of prayer, the chances are it hit some part of the target, if not the bull's eye.

Sometimes we are more aware of distractions than others are. Distractions are bound to come. Do not take them personally or give too much credit to the devil. Babies will cry, sound systems feed back, and visitors walk out on everyone occasionally. If I can stop preaching for a minute and pray or smile at the inconvenience, depending on the circumstances, of course, God will work it out for the good and the congregation will feel closer to me.

Other times, we just need to recognize who are sitting in the pews. Are they overworked, running, and tired? Lengthy preaching may not accomplish our goals. A tired listener is a reality of today's fast-paced culture. It is good to remind ourselves that preaching is not about us. Preaching is about the goodness of God and His presence in all of life.

Giving Our Best

When You Did Your Best, You Gave All You Were Asked to Give.

Nobody wants to fail. Perhaps your time has been absorbed this week by several families in crises and, as a result, your sermon preparation time has been shortened. Your mind may not have been as clear as last week or as it will be next week. But for this message, at this time, what you will preach will be your best effort, even if it seems insignificant. Console yourself in that. Recognize that God asks you to give what you have, not what you do not have. Respond in obedience and leave the rest to Him.

What are some of the situations that can feed a minister's sense of inadequacy?

A sermon that is simple, solid, and comes from the heart will have more power and effect than one that is new and speculative. If a preacher does not know the material well enough to remember it, how can he or she expect the congregation to remember it? We must put our best material into each sermon. God can always give new illustrations for our next message. Even if we are disappointed by a small turnout for the meeting, we should give our best. Each person we preach to is precious to the Lord.

Prayer

Prayer in Jesus' Name and for His Kingdom's Sake Breaks Strongholds.

Sometimes the lack of power you feel may be the result of spiritual oppression. However, God's announced joy and pleasure is in the freeing of people from spiritual bondage and captivity. *Set free* is a wonderful biblical truth. Paul's lament in Romans 7:21–25 seems appropriate: "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me ... Who will rescue me? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Because you have sought to enthrone Jesus Christ, Satan will always try to destroy that effort. Look to God's strength to break whatever spiritual bondage may be present. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4–5). Christ's anointing sets people free.

Preaching

Take Seriously the Preaching Event Every Time.

Why should ministers value the preaching opportunity?

Acts 4 describes Peter and John before the high priests, in jail, being questioned, and then being threatened with physical violence. Through it all these first New Testament preachers held firm:

We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard ... On their release ... they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord ... You made the heavens and earth and the sea and everything in them ... Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:20, 23–24, 29–30)

That is a prayer to take into every pulpit on every occasion for every one of us. Eugene Peterson (1987) says,

I want to speak the word of God that is Scripture in the language and rhythms of the people I live with. I want to know the Scriptures thoroughly, personally, intimately; and then be able to say them again to the people around me. I am given an honored and protected time each week to do that. The pulpit is a great gift and I want to use it well ... I want the people who come to worship in my congregation each Sunday to hear the word of God preached in such a way that they hear its distinctive note of authority as God's Word and to know that their own lives are being addressed on their home territory. A sound outline and snappy illustrations do not make that happen.

Self-Esteem

Your Self-Esteem Is Not Tied to Your Sermon.

Why is it important for preachers to separate themselves from the quality of their preaching effort?

Often when we fail to present ourselves effectively, we feel that our worth is diminished. We define ourselves through our poor performance. But God's acceptance of us does not depend on how brilliantly we preach. His measure of success follows another, more exacting, standard. Do I love Him? Do I obey His Word? Am I His servant?

Paul Stevens (1990) advises this:

Never forget, Christ died for us preachers. We must preach not our experience, but the Christ of our experience. But Christ cannot be preached impersonally. If we cannot look into people's eyes and see their hurt and lostness, we have no right to preach the gospel. Conversely, if we do not allow people to look into our eyes and see how we are being healed and found, we are not preaching Christ. (25–26)

Lesson 6.3 Preaching Trends and Traps

The sun was just rising, and the lake was calling as I gathered my fishing pole, bait, and tackle box. As I headed down the well-worn path, I could see I was not the first one out. I saw and heard two old-timers already discussing what the fish were biting on. Sam was sure he needed one of those new, shiny lures that twirl and spin. But Ned said he just kept using worms: "They were good enough for my grandpa, and they are good enough for me."

Preaching trends are sort of like that. In fact, I am not the first one to use fishing as a metaphor for communicating the gospel. Jesus said He would make us “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Following new trends requires caution to avoid falling into the temptation to go for the momentary applause.

Humor

Point out cautions about using humor in your message.

Humor is a wonderful tool. Researchers tell us that laughing for fifteen minutes a day lowers our blood pressure. A funny, personal story can help everyone relax and stay tuned to the sermon. The Bible tells us that laughter is good medicine. “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22). Good things happen when we laugh. Our barriers drop a little, and we open our hearts and minds.

Many times, my own little mistakes can be turned into an illustration when the story is done tastefully and with wisdom. Laughing at someone else’s expense is not kind. It not only creates tension between you and that person, but also lowers your esteem in the eyes of the listeners. It does not keep the scriptural mandate: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10).

This guideline is never more important to follow than with your own family. A pastor who tells amusing stories at his wife’s or children’s expense must be careful that respect, kindness, and love are woven into the story. And always, ask permission to share someone else’s story.

Plagiarism

Technology has brought the latest materials right into our offices. New and shiny techniques can be tempting. It is so easy to sit in front of a computer on Saturday night and download a sermon or two, then change a name here or there. After all, Ecclesiastes tells us, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

But plagiarism—stealing someone else’s ideas or information and presenting them as your own, without giving proper credit—is sin. There is the misconception that if the material is on the Internet, it is free for anyone’s use. Richard Stern, a Lutheran minister and professor of homiletics said, “People tend to drift into it [plagiarism]. They get pressured (telling themselves), ‘I’ve had three funerals and two weddings; I don’t have a sermon ready, so I’ll just look in this book or go on the Web’ ” (Stern 2003).

Does this mean you cannot incorporate anything you hear or read? Sure, you can. But you must give credit to the source. Even when we do not use an actual quote, it is a habit of integrity to say, “I was reading a book by [author’s name] this week, and it influenced the direction of today’s sermon.” That is authentic and honest before the people and before God.

The Trust Relationship

Discuss ways a preacher can abuse position.

Have you ever thought about the communication dynamics of preaching to a congregation? Usually, you are on a slightly-elevated platform looking *down* on your listeners. Of course, the intention is so that everyone can see you equally well, but it does give you the upper hand.

Now think about the people. They could be called a captive audience. They are expected to sit in one place for the duration of your speaking. They may cross their legs or put their hands in their pockets, but they do not get to move around. They can send limited body language messages—crossed arms to show resistance, droopy heads to show boredom, or leaning forward to show interest.

Why should a minister never share stories from his or her counseling?

Now consider the fact that the preacher gets to do all the talking. A typical Sunday sermon does not provide the forum for interaction, for it would be difficult and time-consuming. Thus, preachers are holding the position of power and must be held accountable for that. This is when respect and consideration are important. The wise preacher does not use this power to do any of the following:

- punish the people with a verbal tongue-lashing
- gossip by telling stories from counseling sessions during the past week
- take advantage of his or her time to push a political agenda
- vent frustrations and anger he or she has not dealt with.

Healthy relationships require that preachers hold gently the power given to them in the pulpit. They should use it to edify and disciple, being sure that a stern message is always delivered with God’s love, grace, and mercy.

True growth in the congregation comes because the gospel is the power of God. “ ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6). The Assemblies of God has set that passage as a standard for every minister. We cannot do this in our own power.

This Word of God is the great equalizer for all God’s servants. The ground is level here, and we each walk under the same judgment. What a liberating confidence! “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). May God make you mighty in the pulpit, but also in the other areas of life where He calls you to be His faithful servant. Amen.⁷

⁷ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 76–85.

Chapter 7 Ministry Relationship Challenges

I had finished preaching in one of our churches, and afterward, at the altar, a tall, good-looking teenager took my hand and asked great questions: “I want my life to really count for God. How can I make that happen? What are the qualities in people’s lives that make them effective in changing the world? What can I do or think now, for God to effectively use me all of my life?”

I pointed him to a biblical character whose life events and choices gave a tremendous answer to his questions. Joseph’s life is recorded in Genesis 37–50, and the essence of Joseph is spoken from the lips of Pharaoh: “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” (Genesis 41:38).

At the end of my life, I would love to have someone say the same about me. When I look at the life of Joseph, I find a leader with dreams and visions, gifted and hardworking. I see all the characteristics of a successful minister. But he had some very difficult people in his life. The episode involving Potiphar’s wife was an attack from the outside. We expect the attacks from the world. But how do we deal with the attacks from inside ourselves? What set Joseph apart? What qualities made him mighty for God, an effective world changer?

Lesson 7.1 Responding to Ministry Challenges

Objective

7.1.1 Discuss the necessity of a high view of God.

Lesson 7.2 The Art of Forgiveness

Objectives

7.2.1 Explain how a forgiving spirit begins within.

7.2.2 Contrast forgiving and forgetting.

Lesson 7.3 The Process of Forgiving

Objectives

7.3.1 Explain two types of relational hurts that require forgiveness.

7.3.2 Describe the first step in the process of forgiveness.

7.3.3 Describe the benefit of forgiveness to the forgiver.

7.3.4 Identify challenges to the process of forgiveness.

Lesson 7.1 Responding to Ministry Challenges

A High View of God

Discuss the necessity of a high view of God.

Joseph had a high view of God; he saw God in charge of life and the world—alive and involved in human events. Joseph had an intimate communication with God and a sense that what was happening to him was directly related to the all-powerful God.

What does it mean to have a high view of God?

People like Joseph have spiritual perspective. Whether pain or success comes, they see it as part of God's involvement in their lives, because He is in charge. For example, Joseph knew his brothers sold him into slavery, but he also knew he was there for a reason. Years later when Joseph saw his brothers, he said, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, head of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt" (Genesis 45:7–8).

When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were afraid he would be vindictive for what they had done to him. They did not understand Joseph's high view of God. "Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid ... you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives'" (Genesis 50:19–20). All of Joseph's relationships with people were controlled by his incredible awareness that life's events fit with the plans of his all-powerful God who was directly in touch with and concerned about his life.

Joseph's sensitivity to God also gave way to divine dreams and visions, which heightened his sense of destiny. Two of Joseph's dreams are recorded in Genesis 37, and both relate to leadership. Joseph listened to his dreams, and God was able to form in him the idea of being a leader. He held an absolute conviction that this was a calling from God. This perspective complements Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."

Trials and Persecution

Joseph experienced a great deal of persecution and trial in his life. His relationship with his brothers was poisoned by envy and competition. His brothers apparently hated him from an early age, and that hatred grew into a desire to kill him. At the last second, he was saved from murder and sold into slavery instead.

Joseph, once a wealthy young man with a promising future, became a slave in a foreign country with a strange language, different food, customs, and values. But even though Joseph was suffering an almost intolerable amount of stress in his life, he was still deeply conscious of God's presence.

Genesis 39:2 contains this amazing statement about Joseph's life in the house of Potiphar: "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered ... And the Lord gave him success in everything he did." This is said regarding his years in prison: "But while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden" (Genesis 39:20–21). Years later when Joseph was married and had children, he said: "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household ... it is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" (Genesis 41:51–52).

All of us want to know how to maintain this kind of optimism in the midst of suffering. We do not start by trying to think positively about suffering and trouble. We start by developing an accurate view of God. We must know that God is in control of everything, that He is deeply concerned about us as individuals, and He wants the very best for us.

After that concept is firmly in place and we sense we are moving through life at His direction, it is only one more short step to see that everything happening in our lives, though difficult, is woven into God's master plan for our development.

One of our pastors called me and said: "I got a phone call from a man in my church who said to me, 'Your preaching is awful. I have never heard even one good one. Last preacher we had here was bad, but he was better than you. When are you going to feed this church?' " Another pastor told me: "I feel like a straight line on a heart monitor."

You will take blows. People will say harsh words to you and do unkind things. You will be challenged, sometimes bullied. Do not let go. You have to trust and believe that any suffering and troubles you are going through are a means of God's grace and growth working in you.

We do not necessarily need more preachers, but we need ministers who will go into the marketplace and see themselves as people on a mission for God, to be the kind of people who represent the qualities of godliness and who are eager for an opportunity to do something significant for God.

Lesson 7.2 The Art of Forgiveness

Explain how a forgiving spirit begins within.

Genesis 42 records the touching story of Joseph's brothers begging for mercy and food from him, not knowing he was their brother whom they had almost murdered and whom they had sold into slavery.

When Joseph finally revealed his identity in Genesis 45:1–15, the passage does not tell us that his brothers expressed remorse and asked for forgiveness. However, Joseph had not stored up bitterness. He did not see this as his chance for revenge. Apparently, all along the way, he had repeatedly forgiven the people who had exploited and misunderstood him. Joseph's life reflected the wisdom of the James 1:20 passage: "Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."

Not only had he worked through and managed his own anger, because he had genuinely forgiven his brothers, but he also became the link to help them forgive themselves. Joseph carried no grudges, nor did he use the past to manipulate his brothers for his own benefit. His forgiveness was real and complete.

When do you feel Joseph truly forgave his brothers?

In Genesis 45:1–15, what observation does Joseph make regarding the Lord's plan in allowing him to be sold into Egypt?

Joseph's forgiving attitude flowed naturally out of his high view of God, his capacity to sense God's direction, and his ability to understand suffering and God's purpose in it. Forgiveness was the next logical step. Without a right perspective of God, we concentrate only on our personal hurts and our righteous anger. An unforgiving attitude robs us of our usefulness to God and His plan for our lives.

How do anger and resentment destroy people?

A legend tells of a Greek Olympic athlete whose bitter spirit prevailed over grace when he lost an important race. A statue was erected to honor the champion, his competitor. As people hailed the winner, the loser became more intensely angry. Revenge filled his thoughts, so he vowed to destroy the statue. Every night he secretly chiseled away at the statue's foundation. Finally, one night while he was angrily chiseling, the statue toppled over and killed him.

Anger, resentment, and unforgiveness have a price. They destroy. Only one antidote to this poison exists: "Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

Forgive or Forget

Contrast forgiving and forgetting.

God offers two answers to our deepest anxieties. He is a forgiving God who nullifies our pasts by forgiving them. He is a promising God who controls and secures our future by making and keeping promises.

How is forgetting different from forgiving?

Forgiving is not forgetting. We forget some hurts because they were too trivial to remember. We forget other hurts because they were too terrible to remember: All we need to forget is a bad memory or a compulsion to suppress. We do the sacred thing when we remember and then forgive.

By His grace, we can forgive and must forgive. We, too, can make a promise and keep it. No one really forgives unless he or she has been hurt. We turn the miracle into a cheap indulgence when we pretend to forgive people who have never hurt us. But not every hurt needs to be forgiven. Some hurts can be swallowed, shrugged off, or chalked up to the risks of being earthen vessels in a crowded world. We should not try to forgive when all we need is to simply exercise a little spiritual generosity. Consider the following hurts:

Annoyances. People annoy us by being late for appointments, by telling boring stories at dinner, and by cutting in front of us at the checkout stand.

Defeats. Some people succeed when we fail; they get promotions when we are ignored; they always seem to be ahead of us. To make things worse, these people who beat us are our friends.

Slights. People we want to notice us ignore us; professors we adored forget our names; pastors we love never invite us into their special circle.

Those are all hurts, but they are not the kind that need forgiving. Such bits and pieces of suffering require tolerance, magnanimity, indulgence, humility—but not forgiving!

Lesson 7.3 The Process of Forgiving

Deep and Moral Hurts

Explain two types of relational hurts that require forgiveness.

The kinds of hurts that need forgiving are both deep and morally based. They are deep because they slice the fiber that holds us together in a human relationship. The morally based hurts are wrongful, unfair, or intolerable. We cannot indulge them or ignore them; we cannot shrug them off. We cannot just chalk them up to the human condition. The sorts of hurts that need forgiving are the ones that build a wall between the wrongdoer and the person he or she wrongfully hurts.

There are two kinds of hurts that must be answered with the miracle of forgiving. They are acts of disloyalty and acts of betrayal. A person is disloyal if he or she treats you as a stranger when, in fact, he or she belongs to you as a friend or partner. Each of us is bound to some special others by the invisible fibers of loyalty. When someone who belongs to us treats us like a stranger, that person digs a ditch and builds a wall between us. In doing so he or she assaults our identity. Words like “abandon,” “forsake,” and “let down” come to mind.

Turn the screw a little tighter, and disloyalty becomes betrayal. As disloyalty makes strangers of people who belong to each other, betrayal turns them into enemies. We are disloyal when we let people down. We betray them when we cut them in pieces.

Peter was disloyal when he denied he ever knew the Lord (Matthew 26:69–75). Judas betrayed Jesus when he turned Him over to His enemies (Matthew 26:47–49). You betray me when you reveal my secret to someone who is likely to use it against me. You betray me when you put me down in front of significant people before whom I have no defense.

These examples all have the same painful feature: Someone who is committed to be on your side turns against you as an enemy. The moment of forgiving comes when someone who ought to be with you forsakes you.

Spiritual Surgery

Describe the first step in the process of forgiveness.

When you forgive someone, you slice away the wrong from the offender. You disengage that person from the hurtful act and recreate him or her. At one moment you identify the individual ineradicably as the person who did you wrong. The next moment you change that identity. He or she is remade in your memory.

What is the first step of forgiveness?

Now you think of him or her not as the person who hurt you, but as a person who needs you; not as the person who alienated you, but as the person who belongs to you. You do not change the person, out there, in his or her being. The person you recreate in your own memory has been altered by spiritual surgery. Sometimes this stage is as far as we can go. Sometimes we need to forgive people who are dead and gone. Sometimes we need to forgive people who do not want our forgiveness.

The miracle of forgiveness is completed when two alienated people start over. Reconciliation is the personal reunion of people who were alienated but belong together. It is the beginning of a new journey together. We must begin where we are, not at an ideal place for reunion. Keep the following distinctions in mind as you work through the process of forgiving.

Forgiving is not excusing. We excuse people when we understand that they are not to blame for the wrong they did us. Forgiving happens only when we refuse to excuse; we forgive only when we blame beforehand.

Forgiving is not always smoothing things over. Some authority figures smother our conflicts, discouraging or even preventing healthy and effective forgiveness. Forgiving happens only when we first admit our hurt and acknowledge our hatred. Those are hard words, but they are true. Unforgiveness is a cold prison, and only truth will set us free (John 8:33–36).

Why Forgive?

Describe the benefit of forgiveness to the forgiver.

To the guilty, forgiveness comes as amazing grace. To the offended, forgiving may sound like outrageous injustice. Take Simon Wiesenthal's story, for instance. Wiesenthal was a Polish prisoner in Germany's Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria during World War II. One day he was assigned to clean out rubbish from a barn the Germans had improvised into a hospital for wounded soldiers. Toward evening a nurse took Wiesenthal by the hand and led him to a young SS trooper, whose face was bandaged with pus-soaked rags and eyes tucked behind gauze. The trooper was perhaps twenty-one years old. He clutched Wiesenthal's hand and said that he had to talk to a Jew; he could not die before he had confessed the sins he had committed against helpless Jews. He felt that he had to be forgiven by a Jew before he died. So he told Wiesenthal a horrible tale of how his battalion had gunned down Jews, parents and children, who were trying to escape from a house set afire by the SS troopers.

Wiesenthal listened to the dying man's whole story, first the story of his innocent youth and then the story of his participation in evil. At the end, Wiesenthal jerked his hand away and walked out of the barn. No word was spoken; no forgiveness was given. Wiesenthal would not, could not, forgive. But he was not sure he did right (Wiesenthal 1976).

Wiesenthal ended his story with a question: "What would you have done?" Thirty-two eminent persons, mostly Jewish, contributed their answers to his hard question. Most said Wiesenthal was right; he should not have forgiven the SS trooper; it would not have been fair. Why should a man who gave his will to the doing of monumental evil expect a quick word of forgiveness on his deathbed? What right had Wiesenthal to forgive the man for evil he had done to other Jews? If Wiesenthal forgave the soldier, he would be saying that the Holocaust was not so evil.

In what way does forgiveness cost the forgiver?

So what is the answer to the unfairness of forgiving? Forgiving is a better way to fairness. First, forgiving creates a new possibility of fairness by releasing us from the unfair past. A moment of unfair wrong has been done; it is in the inevitable past. If we choose, we can stick with that past. And we can multiply its wrongness. If we do not forgive, our only recourse is revenge. But revenge glues us to the past. And it dooms us to repeat it.

Second, forgiveness brings fairness to the forgiver. It is the hurting person who most feels the burden of unfairness; but the hurting person only condemns himself or herself to more unfairness by refusing to forgive. Forgiving turns off pained memory and is, thus, the only way back to fairness.

How Do We Forgive?

Identify challenges to the process of forgiveness.

Here are three things I have noticed about how people forgive:

People Forgive Slowly.

Is it acceptable for forgiveness to take time? Explain.

C. S. Lewis had a monster for a teacher when he was a boy. He hated that academic sadist most of his life. But a few months before the end, he wrote to an American friend: “Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realized suddenly that I at last had forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I’d been trying to do it for years” (Lewis, as quoted in MacDonald 2006). It may take time, but essentially and eventually, we can forgive.

People Forgive Communally.

Can anyone forgive alone? I need people who hurt as I hurt and who hate as I hate. If you are hooked into your videotape of past pain, seek a fellowship of slow forgivers. They may help.

People Forgive As They Are Forgiven.

When it comes down to it, anyone who forgives can hardly tell the difference between feeling forgiven and doing the forgiving. We cannot forgive people who offend us without feeling that we are being set free ourselves.

I have not found a better example of this truth than Corrie Ten Boom. She was trapped for the war years in a concentration camp, humiliated and degraded, especially in the delousing shower where the women were ogled by the leering guards. But she made it through that hell. And eventually she felt she had, by grace, forgiven even those fiends who guarded the shower stalls.

One Sunday, in Munich, she saw a man come toward her, hand outstretched: “Ja, Fräulein, it is wonderful that Jesus forgives us all our sins, just as you say” (Ten Boom, as quoted in James 1997). She remembered his face; it was the leering, lecherous, mocking face of an SS guard of the shower stall.

Her hand froze at her side. She could not forgive. She thought she had forgiven all. But she could not forgive when she met a guard, standing in the solid flesh in front of her. Ashamed, horrified at herself, she prayed: “Lord, forgive me, I cannot forgive.” And as she prayed she felt forgiven, accepted, in spite of her shabby performance as a famous forgiver. Her hand was suddenly unfrozen. The ice of hate melted. Her hand went out. She forgave as she felt forgiven.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. To forgive is to reach back into your hurting past and recreate it in your memory so that you can begin again. To forgive is to dance to the beat of God’s forgiving heart. It is to ride the crest of love’s strongest wave. Our only escape from history’s cruel unfairness, our only passage to the future’s creative possibilities, is the miracle of forgiving (Smedes 2002).

Nothing you can do will change the past. Unforgiveness takes you away from giving your energy to the present and future. It makes you responsible at this point for jeopardizing relationships. Even if you have been severely offended, by dwelling on the offense you place a continuing burden on the relationship.

Unforgiveness denies the other person the opportunity to change for the better. It does little to elevate you in the eyes of others. Building bridges to connect ourselves to others in hope and peace is far more enduring than blowing up relationships through childish behavior. It takes patience and work, but in the end, it is worth whatever price is spent.

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything” (Matthew 5:13). We have the privilege to penetrate our neighborhood with grace-filled living and be good for something and someone.⁸

⁸ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 88–94.

Chapter 8 Building Trust in Ministry

We are familiar with this adage that is generally attributed to Benjamin Franklin: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This chapter looks at preventative guidelines for handling the day-to-day operations of your work that will protect and build relationships of trust in your ministry. “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Lesson 8.1 Accountability

Objective

8.1.1 *Explain the purpose for bylaws.*

Lesson 8.2 The Church Board

Objectives

8.2.1 *Indicate guidelines for developing a healthy church board.*

8.2.2 *Describe normal procedures for the business of the board.*

Lesson 8.3 The Process of Change

Objectives

8.3.1 *Describe the pastor’s leadership role in change.*

8.3.2 *Discuss the importance of being sensitive to timing in the process of change.*

8.3.3 *Relate how principles help prioritize change.*

Lesson 8.4 Managing Your Time

Objectives

8.4.1 *Explain why time is difficult to manage and why it must be a priority.*

8.4.2 *List at least five habits that you will incorporate into your time management approach.*

8.4.3 *Explain why finding time is not logical, and give an alternative approach to apply.*

Lesson 8.1 Accountability

The single most effective strategy for building public confidence in organizational church life is accountability. Without a system of openness and transparency, providing disclosure of decisions and actions, a pastoral leader invites suspicion and mistrust. Thus, the need arises for a system or process of operations to be engaged.

Bylaws

Explain the purpose for bylaws.

Every congregation should be accountable to its bylaws, and those bylaws should provide for structures of responsible accountability for everyone within the organization.

What are a church's bylaws?

The purpose of bylaws is to set up a procedure by which the church operates. This procedure is not an obstacle to effective ministry but an aid to getting things done right. It is important to cultivate a congregational respect for the bylaws. And the foundation of accountability is a uniform governance standard to which everyone must conform.

Financial Integrity

Since money is a hot button for everybody, maintaining financial integrity requires full disclosure on a regular basis to a competent church board, and to the congregation at the annual business meeting. Churches cannot take the congregation's giving for granted. They must become aware of what motivates people to contribute. A church's budget should be analyzed for cost-benefit ratios, as would be the case in any effective business or organization. In ministry, organizational efficiency means positive, tangible outcomes resulting from investing of funds that reflect the church's mission and vision.

A key factor in any church's finances is its vision, or its sense of direction. Without a clear focus, ministry becomes a matter of survival. This is especially important to generations who tend to look at their giving more as a personal investment than as a spiritual responsibility. Not only do people today want to see their money used effectively, they also want personal involvement in particular facets of ministry. They are less concerned with the big picture than in the past.

If a church wants to regain lost credibility, it must make sure it keeps promises and does so within budget. A team of leaders that includes members of the congregation, not just staff, also enhances credibility. This process involves time and a long-term strategy. Personal involvement in ministry changes lives. The task of leading and managing a church effectively remains at the heart of ministry.

The way money is raised, recorded, spent, and accounted for is crucial in establishing financial integrity. The church that invites people to inspect its books and gives an accurate accounting of expenditures will quiet any suspicious dialogue and inspire the confidence of the watchig community.

Accountable to the Vision

To what degree should the people of the church be familiar with its vision?

There should never be confusion about why your church exists. Spell it out in detail. Include your well-defined purpose in every strategy the church undertakes. Your influence within the congregation, and outside as well, will grow as you present clear and compelling reasons for your church's mission to the community. Your actions grow out of your vision. When the actions and the vision do not line up, confusion results, and problems will surely follow.

Be sure that everyone can clearly state the church's purpose. It is one thing for the pastor to know what the church's business is, and it is another thing to transfer that vision to the people so they also can own the vision. This multiplies the impact of the church vision in the community. The Southern California District of the Assemblies of God, for instance, has honed its mission statement to four words: *Serving people in ministry*. The District's reason for being is to empower people for ministry in the local church, to enable leaders to effectively do the work of ministry in their communities. The entire district office staff understands this purpose, believes in it, and works enthusiastically to bring it about. A local church needs to have similar clarity about its mission and vision.

In a well-managed church, everybody knows his or her role in making the church's purpose a reality. Consider a basketball team. Five people are on the court with just one goal—get the ball through the hoop! But unless the forward knows his or her role and the guard blocks the opposing team, the ball will end up at the wrong end of the court. Every player needs to know his or her specific assignment and play the position. The same is true in the church. If the worship leader does not know how much worship time is allotted in the service, or if the youth leader does not know what activities he or she is expected to plan, or if the ushers are not told about special events, there will be confusion. In the well-managed church, these players not only know the overall purpose, but also know exactly what they can do to contribute to reaching the goal.

Keep looking until you find a strategy that works in connecting the message of your church to the needs of your community. Bearing fruit is the evidence. Strategy is different from message. The message does not change, but if your strategy for delivering the message is not working well, adjust your strategy until it makes contact and becomes a significant vehicle for bringing home the message.

Aesthetics

Put your best foot forward by having a neat, clean, and attractive facility, especially those areas people pass through on Sunday morning—from the parking entrance out on the main road, through the parking area, entrances, lobbies, and main halls, to the auditorium. People may not see the offices or rehearsal rooms, just as guests in your home may not see your bedroom closet or the back room shower stall. But people at church will walk through the main areas.

Therefore, give these places the same attention a host gives the front steps, living room, dining room, and bathroom. Neglect of these speaks volumes about church management. Pastoral managers who are careful about details such as these will likely have other aspects of the ministry under control.

Lesson 8.2 The Church Board

Since a church is a corporation, accountable not only to its membership but also to its legal charter, it must pay attention to its paperwork. Corporate existence, health, status, financial condition, liability, and accountability all depend on written documents.

A key component of accountability for any church is an effective system of documentation. Without a proper paper trail, it is difficult for anyone to determine who made what decision, based on what information. Good minutes—the written record of meetings—will tell the story.

Indicate guidelines for developing a healthy church board.

Why must a church be careful to care for the corporate requirements of its board?

People on the church board are given the responsibility to oversee the affairs of the church. In most countries there are legal requirements that must be met. Every good pastor needs accountability and solid working relationships with the members of the board. The building blocks of a healthy board are the mature, biblically founded leaders who are brought together. Review 1 Timothy 3 as you go about finding those leaders and nurturing those relationships. Relationships take time and personal investment. Look for those who project Christlike qualities and sensitivity, who love God, the people, and the church. A mature leader is also a team player and is supportive of leadership, with a history of faithful service to the church body.

Why do pastors sometimes have difficulty with accountability to their boards?

Be wary of those with signs of uncontrolled anger and destructive ways that would work against reconciling difficult relationships. Be careful of those who insist on their own way, who threaten to quit, and who are generally disagreeable. Disagreeableness is the problem, not disagreeing. New ideas are born when discussions allow for freedom to disagree and respect is shown to all.

Describe normal procedures for the business of the board.

A rule of thumb is to always put discussions and decisions in writing. Thompson and Thompson (1991) write,

A board of directors acts only in the form of a resolution. If formal resolutions are not proposed, debated and passed, the board has not acted. Moreover, if a resolution exists only in verbal form, every board member will have a different recollection of what it was. The virtue of putting resolutions in writing is that it helps end any dispute as to what action the board took.

Why must a board have freedom to debate issues?

The board must have the freedom to discuss and debate issues, deliberate, and then make its decision. The board can make responsible decisions only if it has its eyes open and has access to all relevant information. If pastors discourage the asking of questions or characterize reasonable inquiry as negative, then they miss their responsibilities and do not serve the best interests of the church. Board members have no purpose in serving and cannot fulfill their duties if a pastor refuses to provide answers to reasonable questions.

Decision-making at the board level is hard work. It is a process that requires the asking of questions and an insistence upon answers if necessary. It requires an evaluation of facts and information, a weighing of risk and reward, and a review of alternatives. It may also require consultation with experts such as accountants, attorneys, fund-raisers, engineers, and financial planners.

Thompson and Thompson (1991) suggest that a board needs to take eight steps to make effective decisions.

- Ask relevant questions.
- Evaluate information but do not assume all necessary information has been provided.
- Examine the known alternatives.
- Weigh risks and rewards.
- Seek the opinion of experts.

- Consider everything in the light of biblical values.
- Fulfill the church's purposes.
- Decide.

Where only views supporting or approving pastoral decisions are permitted, truth and reality are suppressed. Where differing views are discouraged or characterized as negative thinking, accountability is also suppressed. The result is poor, ineffective, and unaccountable board decision-making. The better rule is to encourage an open and free discussion where all views are heard and respected.

A split board decision is not always unacceptable. Where there is freedom to vote against proposals, accountability abounds, and positive board decisions are possible. The book of Acts relates how the apostle Paul and Barnabas once had a sharp difference of opinion. They disagreed on whether John Mark should accompany them on a return trip to see how the new converts were getting along. Paul rejected the idea and a split decision occurred. Paul chose Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia. Barnabas, however, took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus (Acts 15:36–41).

Although Paul and Barnabas disagreed, it worked out well for both of them. Unanimity was not necessary for the ministry to continue. In fact, unanimity, had it been the rule, would have frustrated any meaningful missionary activity by either Paul or Barnabas.

A caution is in order, however. Boards and pastors are well-served when they develop a cooperative relationship. The pursuit of honest inquiry with an attitude of cooperation toward pastoral leadership will avoid an antagonistic relationship. When cooperation is lost, the church's pastoral leadership, ministry, and accountability will all suffer. When a church's vision and core values are clearly communicated, great energy is infused into the entire organization.

Priorities and timing are always the issue in establishing either personal or congregational schedules. What are the people's current expectations? What should be done first, second, and so on? What needs to be included? Postponed? Eliminated? What effect can be expected? Who will be impacted by the decision?

Decision-making is easy when values are clear. A church's core values are the basis for church leadership decisions. Nothing feels better than playing on a team where everyone is trying to move the ball toward the same goal. Few experiences are more stressful than working with a group whose values are moving them in opposite directions.

Lesson 8.3 The Process of Change

Describe the pastor's leadership role in change.

Herb Miller (1997) tells a story about a museum in Corpus Christi, Texas, which contains an exhibit of a mocking bird skeleton. Inside the winged skeleton is a huge eggshell. The bird produced an egg too large to lay and died trying to lay it.

A leader who emphasizes or promotes teachings that do not match the theological selectivity of most people in his or her congregation understands how that mocking bird must have felt! When you feel change is needed and seek to initiate that change before bringing your board and congregation alongside you, beware! People will follow a good pastor almost anywhere when trust is established. And trust takes work and time. The most common mistake among pastors is trying to change too much, too fast, too soon. We overestimate what we can do in one year and underestimate what we can do in five years.

What is the pastor's most common mistake?

Therefore, when working toward change, a wise pastor's most important role is to determine the parameters in which committees or task forces do their work. The idea is to give away tasks to competent people; let them know what needs to be done and when; empower them; and release them to fly. When you cast your bread on waters like that, it usually comes back buttered and with jam on it.

Timing

Discuss the importance of being sensitive to timing in the process of change.

Several years ago a pastor attempted to lead his nine-hundred-member congregation toward a major building expansion. The church was located in the fastest growing city in the state, and the congregation desperately needed additional seating for worship. Early on, he detected trouble. He had a significant number of building contractors in the congregation. It was apparent to the pastor that building a new sanctuary could possibly lead to unhealthy confrontations between well-meaning professionals, each with good intentions, but with strong views on the right way to do the job.

Reflecting on that experience, he realized that if he had pushed the idea then, it would have split the church. However, a few years later, the congregation built a new sanctuary with little or no discussion. The pastor did not even bring the idea up again; it just seemed to emerge on its own.

What can be accomplished by meeting with negative people individually?

That pastor's experience illustrates that timing is critical to success. Even the best idea, pushed at the wrong moment, can be a disaster. Wise church leaders discern carefully when to call for decision and action. Paul Mundley, director of the Andrew Center, a non-denominational agency for helping pastors and church leaders, suggests six pointers on timing:

1. **Never introduce a new idea and vote on it in the same meeting.** Always allow space between your initial presentation of the new possibility and a final decision. Give people ample time to make up their own minds.
2. **Identify clearly the avenues for additional information and input.** Make people aware of the option of more give and take with you and other members of the appropriate committee. Keep facts and figures flowing.
3. **If people are opposed, meet with them individually.** Listen carefully to objections, reviewing the benefits of the proposed change as needed. Acknowledge their concern to validate their place of belonging to the team.
4. **Do not position yourself for a negative vote.** Avoid a decision or vote, at all costs, when the tide is taking your boat out to sea.
5. **If you sense that the tide is against you, do a reassessment.** Does the vision or goal have broad backing, or is it an idea that belongs to only a few people? You may need to broaden the support base before proceeding.
6. **When you sense that people are with you, bring them together and move toward a positive vote** (Mundley as quoted by Rachels 2005, 1).

May the Lord, whose timing is always perfect, help us to keep our priorities straight!

Change Principles

Relate how principles help prioritize change.

In guiding people toward a realistic pace of change, Paul Mundley further suggests that pastors and lay leaders follow these principles or affirmations:

Grandiose Is Not Always Grand.

Which of the five principles seems most essential to you and why?

Over-ambitious, big time plans do not always serve the best interests of a local church. In many instances, small is beautiful, beneficial, and better. Management guru, Charles Handy, reminds us that it is often the seemingly insignificant things that alter life most profoundly:

The chimney, for instance, may have caused more social change than any war. Without a chimney, everyone had to huddle together in one central place around a fire, with a hole in the roof above. The chimney, with its separate flues, made it possible for one dwelling to heat a variety of rooms. Small units could huddle together independently. The cohesion of the tribe in winter slipped away. (Handy as quoted in Rachels 2003)

Where do you need to build chimneys—rather than bonfires—in the life of your congregation?

A Journey of Many Miles Is Taken in Many Steps.

Most of us overestimate what can be accomplished in a year and underestimate what can be accomplished in a decade. Most change efforts need to be undertaken step-by-step, plank-by-plank. Three years worth of change cannot take place in three months. But it can be broken down into a series of smaller incremental changes. A sequence of multiple steps gives people time to adjust to each smaller change as it comes.

One Size Does Not Fit All.

Congregations can be seduced by the notion that a successful change effort in one place will automatically work in their church. Each congregation has its unique identity, defined by its culture, systems, and temperament. Church size affects the programs and ministry approaches that a leader should attempt. For instance, it might not be wise to force highly structured programming on a smaller, relationally based, family church.

Addition Is Better Than Subtraction.

Change happens best as we multiply people's options, rather than pull the plug on cherished activities. Adding a Saturday morning small group for working women is preferable to disbanding the Tuesday morning sewing circle.

God's Provision Accompanies God's Vision.

Dream the dreams, but count the cost. Challenge committees or task teams with a fundamental question: "Do we have the minimal resources necessary—in terms of time, money, people, and energy—to undertake this effort?" The tension between vision and provision will always exist. Effective pastors are change agents—they must know what to change, why it must be changed, and how to bring to bear the resources that can accomplish the needed changes.

Lesson 8.4 Managing Your Time

Explain why time is most difficult to manage and why it must be a priority.

The term *time management* seems like an oxymoron—two words that make no sense when linked together—to most church leaders. People will often criticize our use of time. Sometimes my biggest critic is me. I know how easy it is to get caught up in watching a basketball game for a “few minutes” and then realize that I had set that time aside to do calendar planning before tomorrow’s staff meeting. Other times, I am right on target; then the phone rings, and I am on my way out the door to an emergency hospital visit. The challenge of time management can seem as hopeless as putting money “in a purse with holes in it” (Haggai 1:6).

Why is time the most difficult resource to manage?

Church leaders work with five resources: time, people, money, buildings, and equipment. Of these five, time is the hardest to manage because we cannot see it. Yet this invisible resource determines what we accomplish with the other four.

Several effective principles and methods have emerged in recent years. Some of these come from the business world; others are unique to church life. As you review the qualities/characteristics of thinking and behavior patterns for keeping control of the things that can be controlled in your schedule, ask yourself the question: Do my time management habits help or hinder my productivity as a church leader? In Paul’s instruction to Timothy, he emphasized the character aspect of self-discipline. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). If you read these words and consider your own habits and are discouraged, take that Word to heart. Healthy ministry habits are built on the character of self-discipline, and self-discipline comes from His power because of His love.

Practical Guidelines for Time Management

List at least five habits that you will incorporate into your time management approach.

Here are some practical suggestions encouraged by Herb Miller (1997) that may help improve your efficiency in getting things done.

Establish a work base. Have everything at hand when you need it: files, books, office tools, and so forth.

Carry a notebook. Write down ideas and things to do as soon as they occur to you.

Review problems to be solved in your mind before going to bed. Frequently your subconscious self will work on ideas while you sleep. If you find you have sleepless nights, leave a notebook by your bed and when you awake with worries on your mind, write them down to be dealt with in the light of day.

Once you have picked up a letter or other paper, do not put it down until you have made a decision on what to do: discard it; mark it for attention to the appropriate individual with action indicated; answer it; or put it aside to be considered when you have the time to devote the necessary action to handle it.

Keep an organized reminder file of projects, arranged by date. Some systems are called “tickler files” (to tickle your memory, I suppose). The system has forty-three folders: twelve folders for the months of the year and another set of folders numbered 1–31 for the current month’s days. Many pastors have found new ways to do this on computer. Whatever way you choose, be consistent. The tool works only when we use it.

Standardize your answers to routine letters, and keep copies of your responses to difficult issues. When you are inspired with an effective and kind way to communicate on a difficult theme, you will be able to go back to your own writing.

Eat light at noon to avoid feeling groggy in the afternoon.

Write down the six most important things you should do tomorrow in order of priority. Then, first thing tomorrow, work the items in the priority you arranged. Then make a new list.

Avoid meetings that do not have a clear goal. Send an agenda in advance of every meeting and follow it. Announce an end time, as well as beginning time for all meetings. Observe both as much as possible. Have every meeting end with agreement on what is to be done. I recommend breakfast meetings. They are more efficient than lunches or dinners.

Leave a sentence unfinished when you are working on a project or sermon, and stop for the day. It can help you start the next day.

Confirm meetings, appointments, travel directions, schedules, and so forth, by telephone in advance.

Plan your phone calls to avoid prolonged conversations. Learn to say “I think that covers it. Anything else we should discuss?” or, “Thanks for your help. We will talk again later.”

Do not confuse efficiency with effectiveness. In footraces in ancient Greece, the winner was not the runner who crossed the finish line first, but the one who crossed in the least time with his torch still burning.

Use your waiting time for reading, making lists, listening to CDs, or reflection. If you start using sixty minutes of dead time each day, you add seven new hours a week, thirty new hours a month, and 365 new hours a year. That is enough time to write a book each year, read dozens of

books, or accomplish innumerable important objectives. With CDs you can easily transform the time you spend driving into continuous education.

Ask, “Do I have to do this?” An honest examination may reveal surprises.

Free yourself of tasks that can or should be done by others. If you explain things fully, and check results carefully, you can multiply your effectiveness.

Do not do things yourself because you insist on perfection. Even if someone cannot do the job as well as you would, but can do it adequately, it frees you for other, more important tasks.

Do not take back a job given to someone else.

Make provisions for personal and family appointments in your time planning. Schedule time for your spouse, children, hobbies, and friends.

Beat procrastination by breaking tasks into pieces. Take one step at a time.

Avoid interruptions when you are working. Do not see everyone who asks. Find out and decide whether the matter needs immediate attention or can wait.

Do not rush. Schedule time to allow for proper evaluation to avoid errors and misjudgments.

Give yourself deadlines. For a stronger commitment, tell people about them. This creates accountability. Fear of embarrassing yourself will help you meet deadlines. Some ministers commit themselves to having the Sunday sermon written days in advance.

Give yourself brief quiet times. This does not include the hours you schedule for prayer and study or for clearing your mind when faced with a crisis. Centering your whole person for even five minutes, just to think, is valuable in getting control of what you may need to say or explain in a sensitive situation.

Do not waste time feeling guilty. If you cannot correct an error, just go on with the rest of the job.

Ask people to suggest solutions when they come to you with problems.

Extend your planning from day-to-day to a week or month. Know what to expect and how you can handle other projects.

Reserve time for spiritual reflection. Our minds are the primary instruments God uses to play the song of His will in our lives. If we do not make time available for God to play His instrument, our work associates, church, and world will miss part of the music.

Finding Time

Explain why finding time is not logical, and give an alternative approach to apply.

Leaders often lament their need to *find the time* to effectively accomplish their ministry tasks. Finding time is a picturesque metaphor but a less-than-precise phrase. Time is never lost, only poorly used. If leaders see themselves as stewards of a precious gift and build on that perception with effective goals and habits, effective ministry results.

Why is finding time an illogical goal?

First, decide your life and ministry priorities. Second, decide to use your time to accomplish those priorities, instead of the dozens of other important matters that clamor for control of your time. Function from this perspective, rather than a perspective of trying to use more time efficiently, and you will find the time about which other people only dream.

Your life and ministry will reflect those decisions. Remember our mission statement: Serving people in ministry. Every decision is based on that. On the one hand, you might think that it means I would keep my door open at all times. Essentially, my door is nearly always open to whoever comes by and needs an opportunity to talk over an issue or share a personal struggle. But occasionally, this mission statement requires me to close my door in order to effectively *serve the people in ministry*. Both decisions are made to reflect my mission. Here are some recommendations to assist you in effectively managing your time:

- Most pastors and church leaders recognize that, despite countless books and articles on the art/science of management, something is still missing.
- Our role as leaders and managers in the Lord's church must have both *today* and *tomorrow* perspectives. And tomorrow will surely come, having empty pockets, unless you begin planning today.
- You want to be a better preacher? Spend more time with the Scriptures; study and read widely, working at preparing your sermons.
- You want better board meetings? Plan ahead for each agenda item and honor the thoughts and ideas of members by respecting their hesitations, feelings, and ideas.
- You want a clean church building and grounds? Call for a work day and be there to help too. Organize volunteers if you cannot afford to hire workers.
- You want a congregation, healthy in spirit and generosity? Learn of ways you can be a healthier person. People copy what they see.
- You feel isolated and lonely, without others to share your troubles and burdens? Form an accountability group of people you trust, and meet regularly.
- You want your spouse and kids to love and respect you? Express love and respect to them.

It is an endless cycle, and the results are unerringly connected to the basic principle taught in 2 Corinthians 9:6: "Remember: a stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop" (*The Message Bible*). You reap what you sow! It is a principle so elementary that all other factors, without exception, pale in comparison.⁹

⁹ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 95–107.

Unit 3 Relating to the Community

Michelangelo, the great Italian Renaissance artist, produced one of the most beautiful sculptures the world has ever seen, in his statue of David. But Diana Craig (1993) writes that the beginning work on the statue was unimpressive:

The huge block of marble from which he was to fashion David had already been worked on by another sculptor, Simone da Fiesole. In an attempt to carve the legs of a giant figure, da Fiesole had hacked away at the marble, mutilating it so severely that his patrons had made him leave the project unfinished.

The block lay abandoned, but Michelangelo saw it and was determined to get a hold of it—and finally managed to do so in 1501, when he returned to Florence from Rome. Although somewhat hampered by da Fiesole’s carving, he immediately set to work, surrounded by a screen so that no one could see what he was doing.

In 1504, the finished sculpture was moved to the Piazza della Signoria and unveiled to reveal the masterpiece that Michelangelo had seen locked within an apparently useless block of stone.

Michaelangelo saw possibilities! Problems were seen too, but none that could not be overcome with patience, insight, and skill. He could have looked at the marble block as an already desecrated piece of work, good for somebody else, maybe, but not good enough for Michelangelo. The chiseled chunkiness of misshapen marble became a priceless beauty.

Your community is your marble. You will see possibilities no one else has imagined. You will have the opportunity to step into places of deep injury and bring God’s healing touch. You will be a *sower* when you feed the hungry. When the trials happen in your community, people will come for answers, and you will be ready.

Chapter 9 The Minister and the Community

Lessons

C9.1 A Focused Mission

C9.2 The Church and Truth

Chapter 10 Evangelism

Lessons

C10.1 Experiencing Faith

C10.2 Reaching Family Members

C10.3 The Church and the World

C10.4 Home Missions

Chapter 11 Crisis in the Community

Lessons

C11.1 Be the Church

C11.2 Community Tragedy

C11.3 Natural Disasters and War

Chapter 9 The Minister and the Community

The ball was heading my direction. All I could focus on was making the play. Everybody was watching, and I wanted to do well. But I found out very quickly that once you are in the middle of the action, making the play is a lot harder than it looks. Watching a game from the sidelines, or on television, thinking, “That is easy, I can do that,” is one thing; being involved on the field, trying to make the play without fumbling is another matter.

It is nearly impossible to communicate all the details, the pressures, the highs and the lows of actual performance to someone not involved! The reason is that it *appears* to be a relatively easy thing to do. The observer can see the whole playing field and often sees what should have happened. Then, if your team does not score, it is easy to get upset. It is easy to blame the players, the manager, and the organization.

The ministry is a lot like that. You are the leader in the spotlight, highly visible, and your every move is carefully monitored by those on the sidelines. You want to preach well, lead effectively, get along, and make a difference in what you say and do. And everybody has an opinion about what needs to be done, what was or was not done, or what should have been done. A spiritual spectator can easily point out failures and successes of other people. But actually doing ministry is tough work, and without the Holy Spirit’s help, ministry is impossible.

Lesson 9.1 A Focused Mission

Objectives

9.1.1 *Explain what draws people to Christ.*

9.1.2 *Identify the quality that makes the church recognizable.*

9.1.3 *Explain the basis for maintaining the light in our ministry.*

Lesson 9.2 The Church and Truth

Objective

9.2.1 *Explain the responsibility of the church in relation to truth in today’s world.*

Lesson 9.1 A Focused Mission

Explain what draws people to Christ.

Our mission is to point people to Christ, the Life Giver and Burden Lifter.

But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.

To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah

From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Selah. (Psalm 3:3–4, 8)

What drew you into a relationship with Christ? What reasons, events, or persons were responsible for you coming to faith and into God's family? Could the reason be that you felt loved and cared for, and found a place to belong? Human nature longs for a sense of belonging. The same qualities that drew you to Christian faith and into God's family are the same ones that will draw others as well. It is a universal principle.

At times we have a tendency to whip people into conformity. We look for commitment and obedience. We create unspoken conditions that we will accept people only if they straighten up, clean up, and follow our rules. But while commitment and obedience are important, consider the un-churched people in your community and how you relate to them.

Since most people are drawn by the compassion and care of Christ, what must the minister be prepared to do?

Compare your relationship to your community with the relationship Jesus had with His community. He was full of mercy and gentleness even as He warned them. John 3:17 tells us that He did not bring a message of condemnation: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Jesus' message was one of reconciliation, a way to belong to God, to become sons and daughters of the Father. Condemnation will not pull people towards Christ's message. Love, mercy, and gentleness will draw people to the loving fellowship of the church.

I remember Pastor Wendell Vinson, from Bakersfield, California, being interviewed at our Assemblies of God General Council in Portland, Oregon. He quoted a pollster who reported that there are 35 million nonchurchgoers in North America who would attend church next Sunday if someone would invite them. He called this idea *bringer-ism*.

Pastor Vinson said non-churched people are reluctant to attend church because of three basic reasons:

1. They do not know anybody there.
2. They do not think the church will connect and speak to them.
3. They are afraid of what people will think of them.

The polls indicated that people who attend church for the first time are looking for the answer to one question: “Is anyone here like me?”

As Thom Rainer (2005) put it:

Some churches, for certain, abandon many of the cardinal truths of the faith in their quest to be relevant to the community they serve. But even more churches are woefully unaware of the realities, hopes, and pains of those around us. Failure to be true to doctrines of the Christian faith leads to apostasy. Failure to understand the world in which we live and serve leads to irrelevancy.

Today people all over the world are looking for answers to the struggles and issues in their daily lives. Paul’s words to us through the New Testament church give us a good answer to humanity’s spiritual hunger.

But what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like:

1. affection for others [love]
2. exuberance about life [joy]
3. serenity [peace]
4. willingness to stick with things [patience]
5. compassion [kindness]
6. basic holiness [goodness]
7. loyalty [faithfulness]
8. not needing to force our way in life [gentleness]
9. marshalling and directing our energies wisely [self-control] (Galatians 5:22–23).

Recognizing the Church

Identify the quality that makes the church recognizable.

Recently, I took my wife, Judy, to the Orange County Airport for an early morning flight. I helped her with her luggage, kissed her good-bye, and then I sat at the curbside watching as other people, mostly couples, were dropping each other off to catch their planes.

Luggage was quickly pulled out of back seats of cars and trunks. There were curbside hugs and kisses, and all levels of good-bye enthusiasm were expressed! One woman stepped out of a

car and jerked her luggage from a man [probably her husband], not even looking at him. She slammed her car door and walked quickly away without looking back.

Another couple briefly kissed. Another gave a quick hug. One woman madly embraced a man, kissed him several times, let go, then pulled him back for one more kiss. I looked at this display. The man appeared to be about forty-five years old and was wearing tennis shoes and baggy pants. His tie was off to the side. He was a little overweight, with glasses, and chubby cheeks, and he had a big grin! I did not know this man or woman, but it was easy to deduce that these were two people in love saying a deeply felt farewell. A thought flashed into my mind, “See how they love one another.”

This is a positive and energizing message for those leaders who preach to others, who prepare sermons, who study, think, and pray. We need to ask ourselves if those who are standing on the curbsides in our community can see how we love one another. Can they see that in our sermons? Can they see how we love one another through the ministry priorities of our church? Does our behavior create a Christ-honoring relationship bridge, so that the message is felt, tasted, and experienced like good fruit? Demonstrating love for one another will affect a life for eternity.

According to Jesus, what is the key way that people know we belong to Him?

Jesus said that it is by our loving one another that all people will know we are of Him (John 13:35). That is the message we, people called by God to lead congregations and ministries, must communicate if we are to be transformational servants of Christ. This message of love will help people restore their unfulfilled dreams, their broken lives, and their shattered hopes. It will also tell people about the father who waits with ring, robe, shoes, and banquet (Luke 15). Our message must clearly announce that hurting and lonely people only need to “come to their senses” (v. 17) and come home.

In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), the boy walked away from home and squandered his money. When all his resources were gone and he was resigned to eating pig food, he remembered his home and returned to confess his folly to his father.

The father did not say, “Well, son, if I am going to take you back, then you and I are going to get something straight. The rules must be kept: comb your hair and cut it, no tattoos; and get that nose ring out! There will be an early curfew for you too! Now, sign here that you will never disappoint me again! One more failure and you are gone—got that?” No, that is not what happened. But church culture sometimes unwisely creates a conversation like that.

What the biblical text says is this:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and

celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20–24)

What a father! No condemnation, but celebration! It is our heavenly Father who lifts the heads and hearts of people who have shattered lives and broken dreams, who forgives, who redeems, who says “Welcome home!” Our God is a loving Father! And *you* have the privilege of being the communicator of that incredible message!

Lost People

The churches and people who are the most effective are the ones who run to embrace lost people, wayward people, disconnected people, and confused people. These churches tell the lost that there is a waiting Father whose love and redemption will complete their lives. Lost, confused people have raw hunger within their souls. The world and your community are full of spiritually hungry souls. Like all hungry people, they are looking for food. God looks forward to restoring the lives of people who are starving in a “distant country” (Luke 15:13).

Explain the basis for maintaining the light in our ministry.

As leaders called by God to do the work of the ministry in our community, our first step is to gain a better understanding of God’s point of view. When we see people as God sees them, we will naturally lead the believers who are already in our church to see others as God sees them. God is ready to celebrate a child’s return to home. Clarify your view and vision of who you are called to be and what you are called to do. Doing that requires insight and patience.

What step must the leader take first in guiding people to their mission of winning the lost?

The relay race was reputed to be one of the events at the Isthmian Games, which were held in ancient Corinth. Imagine the runners, each bearing a torch, lined up side-by-side at the starting line. In the distance wait another line of men, and still farther on more runners wait for their turn to carry the torch.

Explain the significance of the story of the lighted relay race.

When the signal is given, the men start to run carrying their lit torches. As a runner reaches his teammate in the next line, he passes on his light. This continues from man to man, until the finish line is reached. The winners are those who cross the finish line with their torches still lit. With the famous relay race in mind, the Greeks coined a saying: “Let those who have the light pass it on.”

Today, modern Greeks celebrate the role of the church in relaying the light each Easter. Each year a lamp is lit at the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. It is flown to Athens where the bishops meet the plane, and each of their lamps is lit from the same flame. They immediately travel to their region of responsibility where the local church leaders meet them with more lamps ready to transport the light. Then as the clock rings the hour of a new Easter Resurrection Sunday, the people from that neighborhood who have gathered with candles are ready as the light is passed from one to the next and to the next until every man, woman, and child with a candle has received the light. The service is dismissed, and in the morning darkness the people begin to return to their homes. Often the church is on a hill, so a beautiful processional of light can be seen from far away.

But the more interesting thing is what happens as the people walk home from the church. A little breeze may catch someone unaware and, suddenly, a light is snuffed out. That person does not waste a moment in disappointment or anger, but immediately he or she reaches out to a neighbor who relights the candle. Often the children run out ahead, but no one is concerned because when their candle light flickers and goes out, they run back for help. The goal is to reach home with a lighted candle. It is easy to see that the participant who tries to go it alone will likely get lost in darkness.

Jesus said:

Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13–16 *The Message Bible*)

Jesus is talking about one of the pastor’s greatest tools, the ability to be a positive influence. Light opens up the dark places. Your community is looking for spiritual leadership to lead residents out of the dark places.

Lesson 9.2 The Church and Truth

Explain the responsibility of the church in relation to truth in today's world.

Several years ago I was part of the American audience watching the news reports when the Senate Judiciary Committee interviewed Supreme Court nominee Judge Clarence Thomas and University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill, trying to find if there was truth in her allegations of sexual harassment.

A radio reporter said, with moral regret in his voice, that “both were under oath to tell the truth, but their stories were different.” He noted, “Everybody who follows current events knew we would be hearing conflicting testimony. What was a surprise was the convincing way it was given. Miss Hill was unflappable under careful questioning and Judge Thomas said, “I have not done what she has alleged.” Obviously, someone was lying.

Why do people avoid truth?

All of this became a teaching moment at our house as our inquisitive twelve-year-old daughter kept asking, “Dad, who is telling the truth?” I talked to her about the moral ideas of truth and its virtues, and lies and their consequences. Still, the media circus that surrounded the event brought to our home a confusing example of integrity and trust.

“It is harder and harder to be an honest person,” says Michael Josephson, head of the Los Angeles based Institute for the Advancement of Ethics. “You feel like a jerk in a world where other people are getting ahead by taking shortcuts.” (Josephson, quoted in Venant, 1991). Josephson, who lectures politicians and CEOs on the value of integrity, says that today “there are more efforts at deception of all kinds ... It’s not only bad, it’s getting worse ... People have also become just plain selfish. It is a world of ‘I wants.’ Basically whatever I want I need, whatever I need I deserve. Whatever I deserve I have a right to have” (Josephson, quoted in Venant, 1991).

Where Has Truth Gone?

Commenting on social trends in America, *Christianity Today* noted:

The American people as a whole continue to be the most openly religious and traditional of all the Western technological societies, a fact frequently noticed by European visitors. It is not only that they profess religious beliefs that surprises some, but that their beliefs actually affect their lives. (December 1979, 7)

Gallup and Poling (1980) add, “Two other trends are clear and provocative: Confidence in the church and organized religion remain very strong compared to nine other key institutions in American life; and most Americans continue to place a great deal of importance on their religious belief” (11).

Retired pastor, David Read, gives this riveting insight:

We have an urgent task before us.... to make clear our profound conviction that matters of right and wrong are not just based on personal preference or prejudice, but are anchored in the will of God who made us, and that religion will do nothing to stop moral rot unless our apparent enthusiasm for God results in less selfishness and greed, less lying and deception, more concern for the poor and hungry, less promiscuity and more fidelity. Otherwise, it is “as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.”

A great Pentecostal leader went to Florida when I was a Bible school student, and he preached on the theme, “Things that happen to truth.” He directed us to the Isaiah 59:14 passage, “Truth has stumbled in the streets,” and detailed ways in which “truth,” like a staggering, drunken man, unable to get its balance in a society whose discernment is blurred, falls in the streets of our world and lies there until picked up and set right. That is a powerful standard to measure your ministry effectiveness in the community. Read the entire verse: “So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter” (Isaiah 59:14).

Keep the following in mind as you work towards transforming your world through truth:

- The most healing medicine for our world today is seeing truth get to its feet.
- It is taking the honest step.
- It is taking actions that bring justice and righteousness to our community life.
- It is living with integrity and wholeness in every aspect of community interaction.
- It is being a person who will not be bought by the sales pitches of shady dealers and moral charlatans who cut corners on the truth.
- It is building a Christ-centered family that models the church and growing a church that models the kingdom of God.
- It is common to the human family that when we see truth at work and rising to her full height, we do not scorn it, but give it applause. The fact remains, truth will always have the last word. “You reap what you sow.”

What is important for spiritual leaders, those who are bearers of truth and citizens of heaven? It is important to ensure that rightness, honesty, and wholeness are the morally tangible vehicles that carry our witness to a society where “truth has stumbled in the streets.” “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). God’s truth has stood forever. We are part of something that is world-changing. Therefore, we must make a difference every day, one light at a time.¹⁰

¹⁰ T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 110–118.

Chapter 10 Evangelism

Evangelism comes from the Koine Greek word εὐάγγελος (eu-angelos), meaning “bringer of good news.” The church is called to communicate the good news to the world. That includes your own “Jerusalem” and your own local community (Acts 1:8).

Many people in our world have not heard the name of Jesus. But most of us live in a community with a Christian church, and we serve in that church to make Christ’s life-changing message known. How can we communicate our faith to people who have not yet discovered God’s love for them?

Lesson 10.1 Experiencing Faith

Objectives

10.1.1 Explain why many people do not become followers of Christ.

10.1.2 Explain the meaning of leap of faith.

Lesson 10.2 Reaching Family Members

Objective

10.2.1 Justify our motivations for reaching our family members and others for Christ.

Lesson 10.3 The Church and the World

Objective

10.3.1 Discuss how the church impacts the world.

Lesson 10.4 Home Missions

Objectives

10.4.1 Identify who is your neighbor.

10.4.2 Give an example of “Samaria” in your region.

Lesson 10.1 Experiencing Faith

Explain why many people do not become followers of Christ.

Michael Cassidy, a South African who founded African Enterprise, used an old tale to present a clear challenge to the person with wavering faith who may doubt the Resurrection. The story goes something like this. [The following letter was found many years ago in a tin, tied to an old pump on a remote desert trail]:

This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock, I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There is enough water in it to prime the pump, but not enough if you drink some first. Pour about one-fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You will get water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you get watered up, fill the bottle and put it back as you found it for the next feller. Desert Pete.

Why is it important to distinguish between following Christ as a religion and following Him out of sacred relationship?

Imagine the year is 1936. You are an exhausted, parched, and desperate traveler. You come to Desert Pete's well. Would you drink the minimal supply, inadequate though it might be, and forget the unlimited supply supposedly in the well? Or would you risk your life and empty the water into the pump in order to gain an adequate supply?

The rash, unthinking person would probably consume the water in a feverish passion of indulgence. The thinking individual sees the issue: by exercising faith, he or she takes a risk to gain the promise of life; but by exercising doubt, the person receives temporary relief and accepts the certainty of death. Can the traveler exercise faith?

The trekker has to consider the object of faith. He or she must believe that Desert Pete is a real person and not a figment of the imagination. No scientific proof of this exists, but the evidence of the tin, the letter, and the bottle under the white rock points in this direction.

What about Desert Pete's character? Was he a hoaxer? The joke seems too macabre to be likely. Was he mad? The rational tone of the letter does not suggest it. Was he reliable? Where his reliability can be tested, namely in the bottle under the rock, he is found to be reliable. The presumption is that he is also reliable where he cannot be tested, and must simply be trusted.

The traveler has a rational basis for faith: the almost certain existence of a reliable man called Desert Pete. Herein is the step of faith, a commitment to Desert Pete and his word. The step is taken, and our traveler is rewarded; the pump works, and the cool, saving flow of water is the proof.

We are in another desert with another well and another word. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

Explain the meaning of leap of faith.

So, if people are not willing to take the leap of faith in Christ's direction, what can I do about it? There are many *how-to* books on evangelism, including a Global University course. Our relationship with our community must include concern for the well-being of its members. We must connect and demonstrate that we care about our neighbors, coworkers, and friends. But when they do not respond, do we leave it there? Do we excuse ourselves and say, "Well, I tried to tell them"?

Why does relationship often make a significant difference?

Following is a story that demonstrates tenacity. Geri Swope and her husband, Robert, pastored Oregon's Brooks Assembly for forty-two years, and Geri worked for forty of those years in administrative assistant positions at the Oregon District Council office. In a letter to me, she wrote: "So now I am seventy-nine years old. I think we still need to be making plans for our service to the Lord. I have a never-fail fudge recipe, and every month I take a plate of the fudge to the bank, drugstore, post office, and often to the doctor, the dentist, and the hardware store."

Unable to sleep one night, she sat up in bed with an overpowering thought: "Why not take some of my fudge to the tavern?" So Geri decided to take whatever risks were involved. If the shepherd in Jesus' story could leave the ninety and nine who were safe, to search for the one who was lost, then she could do something similar.

This fearless woman resolutely left home with her fudge. Pulling the tavern door open, she spotted a man behind the pinball machine. "Are you the manager?" He nodded. She continued, "I live in this community, and I take fudge to other places of business. I wanted to bring some in here to you too." As he considered what she was saying and what was in her hand, she finished with, "I do not drink anything but Diet Pepsi, but I want to be your friend."

Gil, the manager, liked what Geri said and how she said it. He took the fudge, thanked her, and then took her to the bar. Gil introduced her to each man on the bar stools, all while her pastor husband waited outside in their car. Geri said the royal welcome she received in that tavern was as warm as in any church she ever visited. She said, "That night began a new ministry for me. Now, on Saturday nights, I make a large platter of fudge and go to the tavern. I could write a book on my experiences, but I enjoy talking to strangers. Sometimes they have had a little too much to drink, but it does not shake me up. One night, a fellow offered to buy me a drink. I told him, 'I do not drink anything but Diet Pepsi.' "

All the patrons liked Geri. She did not preach to them, but just wanted to love them, gain their confidence, and let them know that she would be there if they needed her. One Saturday night, Geri noticed a young man who had been a regular attendee at their church. She sat next

to him and asked when he was going to come back to the Lord's house. He told her that he was thinking about returning.

Later Geri told Gil that she had his name in her Bible and was praying for him each day. Gil encouraged her to continue praying for him. She mused one day, "It is so good to know that God knows our personalities and just where we can fit into His program to get the gospel out to the world. Gil keeps telling me to bring my husband in. They want to cook us a steak dinner! Now, that is real victory."

Let us not ever give up. Meaningful, personal evangelism is about relationship. First, let us establish a personal relationship with Jesus and then work on growing genuine relationships with real people. Evangelism is not about manipulating formulas or numbers. It is about faithfulness. It is about being salt and light as described in Matthew 5:13–16.

Lesson 10.2 Reaching Family Members

Justify our motivations for reaching our family members and others for Christ.

Salvation is not hereditary. Thomas Fuller (2006) wrote in *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*:

Lord, I find the genealogy of my Savior strangely checkered with four remarkable changes in four immediate generations. Rehoboam begat Abia; that is, a bad father begat a bad son. Abia begat Asa; that is, a bad father, a good son. Asa begat Jehoshaphat; that is, a good father, a good son. Jehoshaphat begat Joram; that is, a good father, a bad son.

I see, Lord, from hence, that my father's piety cannot be handed on; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son." (30)

Choice is one of God's great gifts to humanity. In Luke 15, Jesus told three powerful stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy. The shepherd and widow searched until they found what was lost, but the father waited until his son came home. The father knew that first his prodigal son had to "come to his senses" (v. 17).

One lesson in these stories is that while authority may demand a certain behavior from another person, it will not change a heart. A positive atmosphere is critical in witnessing to family members. Christians are to *be* good news before they share the good news. Joe Aldrich, author of *Lifestyle Evangelism*, calls this "the music of the gospel," which is the beauty of the indwelling

Christ as lived out daily in the relationships of life. “Play the music,” he says, “and as the gospel is translated into music, it makes redemptive relationships possible” (Aldrich 1993).

Respond to the following statement: “It is easier for someone else to reach my unsaved family members than it is for me to reach them.”

Do not let go of your witnessing efforts. A relative’s decision may hinge on your staying power and your refusal to abandon hopes of his or her response to Christ’s call. Also, accept the encouragement and love of friends. A long-forgotten audio tape arrived at our home one Christmas with a note attached, “I think you will like this one! Love, Amelia.” Twenty years earlier in my first pastorate, I would recap my Sunday sermon into a tape recorder, and Amelia would take each tape and play them for our church’s shut-ins. On this particular tape, I heard a faint, babyish voice in the background singing, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” It was my then two-year old son. I often cared for him while making the audio tapes and my wife was away from the house, teaching school. Amelia sent this tape during a time when our son was a prodigal. Our faith was wavering, and we needed to hear and remember him singing that song.

Do not burn bridges. Some of life’s most endearing words are these: “No matter what you have done or where you have been, you can always come home!” Do you need to rebuild a bridge that leads to home? If your relationship is broken, start over. Build a bridge. Apologize for the breakdown. Today is a good day to begin damage repair. Rethink ways to open conversation. You have to *be* the good news before you share the good news. Do not ambush. It is wrong to believe your relative will respond positively to an evangelistic set-up. The good news does not need a trap set for it to be effective. Transparency is more winsome than manipulation.

Maintain a balance of listening and speaking. Time has no substitute. Give the Holy Spirit space to speak. Be available when a family member hurts. Life offers everyone disappointments and loss. Availability is often your greatest ability. A listening ear and compassionate heart give validity and impact to belief. Unconditional love reaches past barriers. It has been said that where love is seen, the message is heard. Nothing can break God’s love connection with you. Do not break a love connection with your family.

And finally, put your family in God’s hands through your prayers. A young boy was with his dad at a corner grocery. The owner opened a huge jar of small candies and told the boy to put his hand in and take all he could hold. “No thanks,” said the boy. The store owner then reached in, took a handful and put it all in the boy’s pocket. Outside, the dad asked why he did not take the candy when first offered. The boy said, “I would have, Dad, but did you see how big his hands were?”

God’s hands are bigger than ours. Here is a word you can take to heart and depend on: “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I’m proof—Public Sinner Number One—of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy. And now he shows me off—evidence of his endless patience—to those who are right on the edge of trusting Him forever” (1 Timothy 1:15–16, *The Message Bible*).

Lesson 10.3 The Church and the World

World Missions

Discuss how the church impacts the world.

Why do some people give money for the work of missionaries but fail to make any effort to evangelize their own families?

Jay Kesler, former Youth for Christ International President and President of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, has said:

I believe in the Church because it has provided motivation for the most lasting, valuable, and selfless efforts of mankind. From where did all the schools, hospitals, orphanages, colleges, relief agencies, the abolition of slavery and women's rights, and the end of child labor come? These came when men and women, moved by God against the backdrop of God's holy justice, decided to change the world.

If you were to reach into the world today, and take away from it the influence of Christian missions, the world would collapse from its own immoral weight.

Barbara Tuckman's great historical account, *The Distant Mirror*, records that in one 12-year period during the Dark Ages, one third of the population of the entire earth from Moscow to Cairo died of the Black Plague. Who were those little men in little brown outfits out picking up the dead and caring for the sick and so on?

Saint Francis of Assisi wasn't just somebody we sing about with birds on his head. St. Francis went out in the name of Jesus Christ to alleviate the greatest suffering this world has ever seen. His interpretation of the Great Commission in Mark 16:15 was "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel and if necessary, use words!" (Kesler 1994–2006)

An important part of our witness to the world and our community is our passion to touch lives with the love and compassion of Jesus. That is translated into providing regular financial resources that aid long-term missionaries in over two hundred countries.

Africa and Latin America

How has the continent of Africa changed in recent decades?

Many senior leaders in all of Africa were taught to read by missionaries. Yet while the Christian faith grows in Africa, the effects of poverty and disease call out for compassion. The Assemblies of God World Missions sends missionaries and HealthCare Ministries teams with resources to fight the global AIDS epidemic.

Also, Latin America Child Care (LACC) is currently at work in twenty countries—through three hundred projects—meeting the needs of eighty-thousand children, allowing them to see the world from a new point of view. The ministry brings young people into a new life by introducing them to Jesus and, in so doing, alters their worldview and perspective. For the first time, they see their lives from a foundation of love and self-respect because of what Christ has done for them. They realize their self-worth and potential, and it opens the door to consider career options and receive the skills to compete in the job market. That is all built upon the realization that Jesus loves them and has a plan for their lives.

Latin America has a generation of children from shanty towns. These children have been touched with Christ's message of hope through His servant leaders. They have experienced the real life message that communicates God's love both verbally and in more tangible ways. This approach works because of the local church. Each LACC child is individually sponsored by another person in another part of the world. It is the local church making a difference in our world.

I believe in the church. Attending and being a vital part of the church of Jesus Christ is not just about a group of people hanging on to ancient traditions. It is not some irrelevant chanting of dead religious phrases. Being part of the church is participating in something that Jesus Christ started, "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

Dr. Kesler also suggested that if we made a schematic drawing of this church, it would be far more complicated than a schematic for a television or a computer. It would involve every Christian's life. A church's schematic would not only depict a series of arrows coming into the church representing the fact that believers come together to sing a few popular hymns and choruses. It would also include many arrows going out, representing each person returning to his or her own sphere of influence. Each of us is distinctive; each person has something unique to contribute to the ministry of the church. That is divinely intended. Therefore, we must all go into our communities and world to be the church of Jesus Christ.

Lesson 10.4 Home Missions

Identify who is your neighbor.

The Assemblies of God was built on a foundation of missions—of reaching beyond our church doors to be witnesses of God’s love and plan for salvation. We sometimes only think of reaching places far away, but when we read Acts 1:8 we understand that the big picture also includes our own neighborhoods. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

One morning I was sitting at a restaurant counter in Long Beach, having breakfast and reading the newspaper. I wanted to bask in the morning freedom alone. Coming in and taking a counter stool beside me was an elderly lady who kept glancing my way. I could tell that she was eager to start a conversation. She started to chatter: “When do you think the recession will end?” “I have a daughter in Palo Alto.” “I own property in Long Beach.” “The food here is wonderful.” “I do not think women should work outside the home until their children are at least five years or older, and then I am not sure. What do you think?”

I answered every question, barely looking up. I answered with only a *yes* or a *no*. I just wanted to read my paper. Finally, I realized that this persistent lady would not give up. I put my paper aside, and we talked until we were both full of coffee.

How did Jesus answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

That lonely person was looking for a friend, trying to find someone to acknowledge that she was a person who mattered. She wanted desperately to talk to somebody, and I was somebody. This incident reminded me of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

As I left that restaurant counter, I asked myself, “Who is my neighbor?” That elderly lady was. So was the quiet young man who poured my coffee. So was the handsome couple who took our empty stools as we left. All people are our neighbors.

My pastoral perspective is shaped, first of all, by the biblical perspective of the worth of human beings. People are an end in themselves, not a means to some end of mine. My real congregation includes the people of the world, like that lonely lady at the counter. Exclude any one and you undercut the calling of God on your life.

A young missionary to Germany asked a local Lutheran pastor how large his church was. The missionary was surprised to receive an answer of “six thousand.” Impressed, the missionary continued his questioning. How many services were conducted each Sunday? “Only one,” was

the answer. "About two-hundred people from our parish attend." The young pastor had not answered the first question with the actual number of people who sat in the pews each Sunday morning. His answer demonstrated that his first priority was the number of people living in the local parish, the area that he accepted as his responsibility.

One night my phone rang at two-thirty in the morning. I pulled out of sleep and picked up the phone. A man spoke; I heard a lot of background noise. It sounded like a bar. He had a slight slur in his speech and was asking for help.

I listened briefly and told him to call me the next day. He said, "Pastor, people hurt at three in the morning as well as three in the afternoon." That man was another "neighbor." Remember that the ministry is an act of continually losing your life for Christ's sake. Matthew 10:39 says, "whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses it for my sake will find it."

As I study Scripture, I note that while Jesus did seem to have certain goals in mind, He lived almost totally as a responder. That is, the demands and needs of the people around Him set His agenda. He did not make out a schedule first thing in the morning and then strictly follow it. He saw people and their needs as an opportunity to minister, and He followed through. Whether a pastor or lay person, every leader is tempted to abandon the task of service to Christ and make do with simply being popular.

Give an example of "Samaria" in your region.

Many people in our world are not lovely to encounter. Every major city has an area that we likely avoid because of fear, dislike, or some discomfort. Yet, Jesus expects us to reach out to those discarded people.

What steps can you take to demonstrate Christ's love to *unwanted* people?

Most of us in ministry are not well-qualified to deal with the extreme measures needed to help a neighbor who is enslaved to heroin or enmeshed in gangs. But Teen Challenge International provides a model for reaching out to the hard places.

Phil Cookes, a Southern California inner city pastor and Los Angeles Teen Challenge director, says that he was arrested in the parking lot of Hawthorne Assembly of God when he was fifteen years old. He writes:

Jumping fences on church property, I used the parking lot to get away from the police who knew I sold heroin in two houses in the neighborhood. I grew up in that neighborhood! I knew Hawthorne's pastor. Pastor Ireland would see me and tell me Jesus loved me. I'd smile and keep running. But I respected him because I knew he loved me and wanted to help me.

When I got caught, I went through the Teen Challenge rehabilitation program. Now I'm pastoring that same church in Hawthorne, sleeping in the same bed Pastor J. A. Ireland slept in, studying from his commentaries, and preaching from all his Bibles.

If my mother, who prayed for me, could only see me now. I am ready for an inter-planetary journey. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. But till He comes, I'm staying put, to tell my old neighborhood about Jesus.

We need to hear and preach this message: "Until He comes, stay put, and tell your neighborhood about Jesus!"¹¹

¹¹ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 119–129.

Chapter 11 Crisis in the Community

A quick survey of your community will likely reveal many impressions of the church, as well as a variety of opinions of what the church should be. Gone are the days where the local church was such a central part of a community that virtually all understood its mission and anticipated its efforts. With the rapidly expanding religious diversity of most communities and the shift to a post-modern mind-set, fewer and fewer people are connecting with the biblical idea of the church.

Instead, the church's place in the social and political arena has become the focus. One church may picket against this behavior while another puts its muscle behind a conservative candidate. To the uninitiated, the church is a social entity with political agendas and an aggressive desire to influence the moral choices of people who do not even walk through its doors. Try to convince the crowd at a mall food court that the church is the repository of God's love. In fact, some of those doubting your claim might tell stories of the hurt and rejection they once encountered in a church.

It is a lot to overcome, but one of the key ways these darker impressions of the church are being overcome is through the church's commitment to helping people in crisis. Recent high profile disasters have highlighted the heroic nature of the helping spirit, an attitude demonstrated by many in the church. Natural disasters, community crises, and everyday people in need have become key response points for the church. The relative affluence of our nation has left many individuals ill-prepared for disaster and found them searching for love and support when overwhelming events wreak their havoc.

Sadly, some congregations maintain their distance from disaster. Carefully cloistered in their safe houses, they only offer aid to their own. Their neglect of the suffering paints their theology as obsolete and their love as non-existent. For these churches, survival is a speculative proposition at best. Rather, it is the involved who find meaning to their faith and the appreciative embrace of the communities they have been called to reach. These are the stories and the focus we will pursue in this chapter.

Lesson 11.1 Be the Church

Objective

11.1.1 Identify guidelines for helping hurting members of the community through difficult times.

Lesson 11.2 Community Tragedy

Objectives

11.2.1 Give examples of ministry to a community during tragedy.

11.2.2 Identify ways to reach people in your community who are going through personal struggles.

Lesson 11.3 Natural Disasters and War

Objectives

11.3.1 Explain the model of individual responsibility.

11.3.2 Explain what compassion does to God's adversaries.

Lesson 11.1 Be the Church

What is the church to be to the lost people of this world?

Disaster touched down as a hurricane swept across the city of New Orleans. Levees broke and ruin flooded the city. Helicopters beamed photos of stranded families and streams of evacuees with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Some people declared that judgment had come to that city.

When warnings of a second hurricane were sounded, my wife, Judy, was at a women's retreat. When she was asked if this could be God's judgment on the people of that city, she admitted she did not know the mind of God, but she knew His heart. She told the women that God loves those people and wants them to experience His love in action. She reminded them that it was an opportunity for the church to be the hands and feet that demonstrate God's love to a lost world. "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).

A Time to Mourn

Identify guidelines for helping hurting members of the community through difficult times.

Every day there are people in your community who are facing crises, deaths, divorces, or debilitating illnesses. Many times people who do not attend your church will turn to you for help. How do we respond to poverty, sickness, and death? How do we respond to broken homes and broken people? We can preach to them about their sins. We can advertise our church schedule in the local newspaper. But how can we *be* the church, the body of Christ, in our communities?

What can we do to care for people who need comfort? No matter how at ease we feel in other situations, we often feel unsure of what to say or how to act in the presence of grief. If the other person's anguish and pain are evident, we feel especially uncomfortable. While we may not eliminate our awkwardness entirely, we can help those who hurt. Here are nine suggestions.

1. Accept and encourage emotion.

Why should we accept and encourage emotion?

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4). In our culture many people confuse weeping with weakness, so they hold back tears. Christians sometimes assume that faith and weeping do not mix. Yet, the shortest verse in the Bible says, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). History’s perfect and complete Man stood by the grave of a friend and wept. If someone begins to cry, do not immediately try to stem the emotion. Tears are a necessary part of the grieving process. Encourage him or her.

2. Do not avoid talking about the person who died.

Talking out the experience helps the individual face the loss. Only by turning grief outward can someone who has experienced a severe loss once again resume normal living. Remember that coping with a sudden, unexpected death is particularly difficult. Plans are shattered; words of love not spoken will never be heard. The grief sufferer wrestles with regrets and longs for someone who will listen.

Take your lead from the other person. Perhaps he or she feels conversation would be too painful. Recognize that what the bereaved needs may be silence and the comforting presence of someone who cares. On the other hand, the flow of memories can be as healthy as the flow of tears.

3. When in doubt, be brief.

You will feel less uncomfortable if you do not aim for eloquence. Do not worry about finding the correct word or the appropriate phrases. Most grief sufferers do not hear the words anyway, but they do feel your presence. Think about the hurting person and express in simple words what you feel. In many instances, “I am very sorry,” expressed honestly, says enough. That you are there provides a source of comfort, no matter what you say. Watch for the reaction that tells you whether to put off further conversation or to continue. Sometimes a simple probing comment, “Tell me how you feel,” can offer the opportunity for the other to talk.

4. Do not be surprised at negative feelings.

Why do negative feelings often make us uncomfortable in times of hardship?

Hostility sometimes rises to the surface. People in grief become angry at life, death, God, or the loved one who has died. Of course, we do not easily express hostility and anger toward these things, so at times mourners look for a scapegoat. They lash out at the physician who did not do enough, at a pastor who did not visit enough, or at friends who did not care enough. If the anger is directed at you, absorb the hostility. If it is directed at others, a simple statement like “I trust that the doctor did everything possible” is enough. Perhaps at a later time, if the feelings are expressed again, you can deal with them on a more rational level.

5. Handle grief with sensitivity.

Never blame yourself if the bereaved person becomes visibly upset. Grief hurts deeply. For the time being, nothing that anyone can do or say will actually soften the grief. Understand that you have not caused the pain. Avoid meaningless advice. “You will get over it” does not help or reduce the present pain of loss. “He is in heaven,” may be true, but people grieve not for the Christian who has died, but for their own sense of loss. Platitudes not deeply felt sound as though we do not really understand the impact death has made.

6. Demonstrate your love.

Consider touch if words come hard. Touch often says more than words in expressing how you feel. Be sure to have your spouse or other staff with you to carefully provide that connection within safe boundaries. Often simply touching an arm signals your love and support without words.

7. Think about follow up.

Perhaps you can more easily put your thoughts in writing. You may want to follow up your visit with a note of honest feelings and sympathy. Saying “Call me if I can help you” or “Let me know if there is anything I can possibly do” does not provide real assistance. People in grief find it difficult to ask for help. Instead, follow up with something tangible: an invitation to dinner on a particular date, taking care of the children, an appropriate book, or food for the family.

8. Stay in touch after the funeral.

The darkest periods of grief usually come in the two or three months after death. During these days friends are needed more than ever to listen and to help. On the anniversary of the day a loved one died, a month or even a year later will reawaken strong feelings of grief. Birthdays and holidays will also be difficult. At times like these, you may want to pay a visit to provide emotional support and the reminder that you care.

9. Be aware of God’s comfort.

We cannot escape grief, but we can be less vulnerable if we know “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). For those who have a relationship with the God of love and eternity, there stands the deep assurance in the midst of death’s dark presence: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Lesson 11.2 Community Tragedy

Give examples of ministry to a community during tragedy.

Here is how James describes it, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

Sometimes, difficult funerals become your responsibility. A car-full of teenagers crashes head-on, and you are asked to lead a community through their grief. It is wise to prepare now, to gather funeral and bereavement resources for your bookshelves. Your window of time to minister to the grieving family is short. Obviously, tragedies come without advance notice and often during a busy schedule for the church. Yet it is possible for the minister to respond with unhurried sensitivity and grace. Difficult funerals require a sensitive and strategic approach. Consider these examples:

Why can it be helpful to express questions of why, especially when the family has lost a child?

- Suicide—Remember that it is not our duty to preach people into heaven or hell, but to lovingly challenge those present to put their faith in a caring God. Demonstrate an authentic example of God’s compassion.
- Infants and children—It is often helpful for the family who has lost a baby or child to hear the minister voice the *why* questions in his or her message. The family will experience faith in action by watching the minister model the grieving process.
- Estranged family members—Navigating the rocky path of difficult relationships can challenge even the most seasoned minister. Moderating or meeting separately and working out the details can allow you to be the shock absorber to avoid further family factions during a stressful time.
- Indigent—The seemingly *alone-in-the-world* people often present a unique challenge. The homeless are often the forgotten ones. Learn how to locate your community’s resources that can assist with funeral arrangements, and be sure to connect with special services offered to military veterans. Offering your ministry under these circumstances can be a bridge that will make your church more relevant in your community.

Identify ways to reach people in your community who are going through personal struggles.

It is not uncommon to have a first-time visitor who has just received a life-threatening health report—maybe cancer or a heart condition—from a doctor. How can we help? Of course, we can pray for healing, but we can also pray for the opportunity to show God’s love. Someone wisely said, “People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” A key aspect

in ministry is to demonstrate genuine empathy. Many churches provide a worship service at local nursing homes. Others give groceries to needy families every week.

Jesus is the best example of being in touch with the community. From time-to-time His disciples were confused by some of the things He did. He stopped for little children (Matthew 19:13), touched lepers (Mark 1:40–42), and used mud to heal the blind (John 9:6). If we want to make a difference in our community, then we must leave the comfort of the office and walk in the real world. We must be prepared to practice what we preach.

What does your church do to reach hurting people in your community?

Discover your local community resources. Perhaps all the churches work together to help the homeless. Learn what resources are available. Teen Challenge is one of the most effective ministries for substance abuse issues. Prison chaplains have an impressive record of ministry to juveniles as well as to adults.

An excellent example of fulfilling our call to reach our community with God's compassion is Convoy of Hope. The mission of Convoy of Hope is to transform entire communities with compassion, one life at a time.

Hal Donaldson, president and founder of Convoy of Hope, was transformed by compassion. On August 25, 1969, his parents, Harold and Betty Donaldson, were hit head-on by a drunk driver. Harold was killed; Betty survived but was immobile for some time, unable to work or cook. Their four children experienced firsthand what it is like to live without many of life's basic necessities.

The Donaldsons were fortunate. People from local churches and the community provided them with food and shelter and gave them a sense of hope. Out of this experience, Convoy of Hope was formed in 1994. It began by networking with churches within communities to hold an outreach that would give away groceries, help people find jobs, and present the gospel. Today, over 100,000 guests come to these outreaches yearly.

It is of great importance that each guest be esteemed highly as one valued, loved, and respected without regard for age, physical appearance, or spiritual condition. A typical Convoy of Hope outreach includes grocery distribution, job and health fairs, refreshments, activities for children, and live entertainment. At each outreach, hundreds of volunteers are mobilized to touch guests in a tangible, compassionate manner. Relationships are established that bring hope to thousands of individuals and families who connect with the local church.

Lesson 11.3 Natural Disasters and War

Explain the model of individual responsibility.

We can listen to the news of hundreds or thousands of homeless people displaced by a tsunami or earthquake and consider ourselves to be too far away to do anything. Yet, we are called to care for the widows and orphans and to give to the needy and visit the prisoner.

The Assemblies of God sponsors many ministry outreaches that give the individual the opportunity to help. Sometimes it is giving money to help those on the frontlines of emergency services. The Assemblies of God HealthCare Ministries sends teams around the world with doctors and nurses and translators from our local churches. Just making the members of your church aware of this opportunity can make a difference. Imagine the far-reaching impact if a nurse from your congregation could go to Indonesia to serve those who lost everything in a tsunami.

The children in your local congregation can collect vitamins that are then distributed by the HealthCare Ministries teams. Eyeglasses can be recycled and people in remote villages in Africa can see clearly for the first time.

How has Convoy of Hope revealed what can be accomplished through partnership?

Emergency boxes can be prepared by individuals or groups in your church for distribution to the next hurricane or earthquake victims. Convoy of Hope will deliver them. During disaster relief efforts in Guatemala, two Convoy of Hope team members heard of a stranded village without food or water, high in the mountains. With few details, they prayed for direction, loaded a truck with supplies and headed for the hills. As darkness neared and travel became increasingly more dangerous, they saw a dim light from a gas lamp shining through a rustic church window. They approached the church to ask for directions and found a congregation of starving people who had gathered to pray for food! With tears of joy, the pastor explained, “We were praying for a miracle, and it has reached us before we could say *amen!*”

Hurting people respond to tangible expressions of love and a message of hope, whether it is in Guatemala or London. But when you get down to the person sitting in your church trying to live out what you have preached, how will you guide them to fulfill the Scriptures?

Steve Donaldson, executive vice president of Relief and Development for Convoy of Hope, said that the families who assembled emergency boxes were blessed because this project enabled them to directly participate in a global disaster response. The children were directly involved in going to the store, purchasing the needed items, and packing the boxes. Here is a demonstration of Deuteronomy 10:18: “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.”

We have the opportunity to live authentic lives as Christ’s followers, fulfilling the Scriptures and being the church. The strength of our Fellowship is linking arms with other Christians and demonstrating God’s love to the whole world.

Explain what compassion does to God’s adversaries.

Peter tells us that doing good will silence naysayers: “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15). *The Message Bible* gives an even stronger meaning to that verse: “It is God’s will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you’re a danger to society.”

Some people do not understand who Christians are. They may consider Christians weird and not entirely sane. But when they see you and the people from your church, with your sleeves rolled up serving meals to refugees, handing out eyeglasses, and providing medical supplies, something happens to make them rethink their opinions.

Laurence Singlehurst says that a Christian’s unselfish and other-person-centered response to human need is like the first step in the sowing process for today’s world. Those people look at us and say, “God is good and Christians are okay.” The door is then open to take the next step. “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Proverbs 19:17).

About 24,000 people die every day in our world from hunger or hunger-related causes. Three-fourths of the deaths are children under the age of five (Rodin 2006). Some 800 million people around the globe suffer from hunger and malnutrition (UN News 2006). More than 10 percent of children in developing countries die before the age of five (CARE). Approximately 2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars a day and 1.2 billion people live on less than one dollar a day (World Food Program).

As a Christian fellowship, we are blessed to have many ministries that we can partner with to touch those in need with compassion. A wise pastor will lead the way by developing a strategy to regularly give and work for the purpose of helping others. One pastor in our Southern California District takes a team every year to build a church for people without the resources to build their own. His congregation is excited about this outreach and plans and saves for it all year long. This giving church holds its own meetings in a community center. They have no building of their own, but they are demonstrating God’s love. They are being the church. God asks the same of each of us.

A Burden to Carry

Sadhu Sundar Singh was a Hindu convert to Christianity who later became a missionary in India. One late afternoon, Sadhu was traveling on foot through the Himalayas with a Buddhist monk. It was bitter cold and, with night approaching, the monk warned Sadhu that they were in danger of freezing to death if they did not reach the monastery before darkness fell. Just as they were traversing a narrow path above a steep precipice, they heard a cry for help. On a rock shelf on the cliff’s side lay a man, fallen and injured. The monk looked at Sadhu and said, “Do not stop. God has brought this man to his fate. He must work it out for himself. Let us hurry on before we, too, perish.” But Sadhu, the Christian, replied, “God has sent me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him.”

The monk made off through the whirling snow, while the missionary clambered down. The man’s leg was broken, and he could not walk. So Sadhu took his blanket, made a sling, and tied the man on his back. Then, bending under his burden, he began a body-torturing climb. By the time he reached the narrow path again, he was drenched with perspiration.

Doggedly, he made his way on through the deepening snow. It was dark now, but he persevered. Though faint with fatigue and overheated from exertion, he finally saw ahead the lights of the monastery.

Then for the first time, Sadhu stumbled and nearly fell, but it was not from weakness. He had stumbled over something lying in the road. Slowly he bent down on one knee and brushed the snow from the frozen body of the monk who had been his traveling companion. Years later a disciple of Sadhu's asked him, "What is life's most difficult task?" Without hesitation, Sadhu replied, "To have no burden to carry" (Hindu Convert 2006).

Our commitment to community, to the other person, to those outside our circle, is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches three things: The outside community will test you, religious people may fail to respond to your needs, but God's people will always show mercy.

Another parable gives more insight into how to live out faith in the community. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1–23) gives a picture of what it looks like to work in the field, fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19. When we sow seed, some will land on hard paths that have been pressed down by mystical religions; some seed will be picked up by birds without a chance to grow. Other seeds will be choked out by aggressive weeds of false religions. And some seed will fall on good, productive ground and will yield an abundant harvest. Our commitment to sowing seed, regardless of circumstances, is at the heart of Jesus' teaching.

There is power in faithfulness. An unbelieving community's questions will have their best answers from the gospel that has been incarnated in the lives of Christians. Therefore must Christians preach the gospel to the world, using words if necessary.¹²

¹² T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 130–138.

Chapter 12 Integrity

A handful of dust may seem like just a few dirt particles, but in the 1930s it was evidence of disaster. When farmers settled in the rich Great Plains of mid-America, the crops were amazing. So they plowed more land and planted more crops. When the drought came and the wheat that had held the soil in place was gone, the soil turned to dust swirling in the hot wind.

The tragic effects of this disaster are perhaps best described in John Steinbeck's 1939 novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*:

The dispossessed were drawn west from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, tracted out ... They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do—to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.

The land was stripped of protection from the elements. Cornell soil scientist, David Pimentel, describes soil erosion as one of these insidious problems that would nickel and dime you to death. He notes,

One rainstorm can wash away 1 mm (.04 inches) of dirt. It doesn't sound like much, but when you consider a hectare (2.5 acres), it would take 13 tons of topsoil—or 20 years if left to natural processes—to replace that loss. And that kind of loss occurs year after year by wind and rain around the world. (Lang 2006).

Think about that for just a moment. A farmer has no way to stop the rain. Can we excuse the farmer for such a loss that affects his ability to feed the community? Since the 1930s Dustbowl disaster, farmers have learned how to protect the soil by planting ground cover to hold the soil in place, planting trees to block the wind, and planting mixed crops. Meanwhile very few consumers are even aware of the erosion problem, as supermarkets still have produce.

However, while in farming one small millimeter may not seem so significant, in ministry it is wiser to protect one's integrity from tiny erosions than to go the hard road of restoring what is lost.

Lesson 12.1 Recognizing Integrity

Objectives

12.1.1 *Define integrity based on biblical example.*

12.1.2 *Give an example of dissonance in integrity.*

Lesson 12.2 Maintaining Integrity

Objectives

12.2.1 *Give a practical example of integrity in everyday ministry.*

12.2.2 *Indicate three principles that protect your integrity.*

Lesson 12.3 Hard Times and Integrity

Objectives

12.3.1 *Identify principles for maintaining integrity in adversity.*

12.3.2 *Explain what is required to restore integrity.*

Lesson 12.1 Recognizing Integrity

Define integrity based on biblical example.

The word *integrity* has a Hebrew root which means “whole, sound, or unimpaired.” It appears sixteen times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament, and presents examples that include financial accountability and personal reliability. These examples draw a clear distinction of pure and impure motives and conduct. Max DePree, CEO of Henry Miller, Inc., defines integrity as having “a fine sense of one’s obligations.”

The Sound of Integrity

What is the definition of integrity?

I sat in London’s Royal Albert Hall listening to a guide describe that incredible building’s original construction. It was finally finished in the 1870s and built to a round, circular specification so that the acoustics would be good. There were twelve echoes, taking twelve seconds before the last sound died. Sounds just kept bouncing off the walls. The early Londoners loved it, but the problems it presented to modern audiences were too great, so significant adjustments were made.

Give an example of dissonance in integrity.

To correct the unending echoes, modern engineers have drop hung more than one hundred large discs from the dome ceiling to absorb and catch the ricocheting sounds and put, as the English say, “a proper balance to the sounds.” The discs are strategically placed for maximum benefit “to bring a better integrity to the sound,” said the guide, “to make it ‘true,’ so that when people speak or musicians play or sing, they can be heard with distinctness.” When people play and sing, their music is better appreciated because of the appropriateness of balance. The large Frisbee-shaped discs keep the sound in balance, so it does not become distorted. The function of the discs is to enable people to hear without distractions.

The Scriptures tell us that God has built a unique temple in us. He asks, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19). This wonderful temple is built into our inner soul for His presence. Without properly placed integrity factors, our life will get badly out of balance. Romans 3:23 reminds that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But how do we put into place a strategy to maintain this earthly human temple that God has made?

Why is integrity critical for our lives?

Integrity is making wholeness the essential quality of your life. Integrity is the foundation for moral responsibility in your life, so that you communicate a clear and unmistakable sound to the world. There is no dissonance. Your actions do not disagree with your words. Integrity leads you to honesty and reliability.

Chuck Swindoll, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has written widely on the subject of integrity. “One with integrity,” he writes, “will not manipulate others or use his position for padding his own pockets or for his own gain. He will keep a servant’s heart; he will answer hard questions asked by responsible people. Integrity even invites constructive and necessary criticism.”

Innocence and Integrity

For most of us, life seemed simple when we were children. We said we would do something, and we did it. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15).

Children are so wonderfully innocent. Following is one of my favorite stories told by Art Linkletter:

A primary school student was asked what his father did for a living. He grabbed the microphone: “My dad’s a cop. He catches crooks and burglars and spread-eagles them and puts cuffs on them and takes them down to the station and throws them in the slammer.”

“Wow,” said Linkletter, “I bet your mother gets worried about his work.”

“No,” said the kid, “He brings her lots of watches and rings and jewelry!” He said that innocently. It never occurred to this little boy that his dad was doing anything wrong.

Integrity is returning to our childlike ways. Not childish, but childlike. Some in ministry have wandered far away from that place of innocence. Instead of being childlike, they have become slick, manipulative, and conniving. And some, if the truth were known, are living a lie.

You need integrity in your private life—when no one is watching and an evil influence whispers, “No one will know; it will not matter.” Everyday sounds and scenes bombard our inner spirit and drown the harmony and balance in our souls. But God has given us instructions on maintaining wholeness and integrity. Without properly placed integrity, our lives get badly out of balance, and we become vulnerable to numerous negative influences.

God moved David who had been keeping his father’s sheep and brought him to lead the nation. “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (Psalm

78:72). David led with integrity and skill. But somewhere along the line, erosion occurred in David's life. Did he see it happening? How could it have been prevented?

Lesson 12.2 Maintaining Integrity

Give a practical example of integrity in everyday ministry.

Integrity in Action

We have all heard this: "If you cannot say something nice, do not say anything at all." That is a good rule to live by, especially in a calling where talking to people is a significant part of your life. We are told in James 3 that the tongue, that very small part of the body, can be like the rudder on a ship. One word can change your course. A sentence can land you in a different city. A paragraph can put you on a different continent. So guard your words carefully, especially when speaking about your coworkers in ministry. They may be your predecessor, your successor in a pastorate, a pastor across town, or another member of the staff. The same standard applies to all of them.

A great temptation will come to the new pastor. One of the first things tested is his or her pride. Someone will come and say sweet words, "I am so glad *you* are here. Now we can really see our church grow. Your leadership will give us more freedom to do the ministry."

Proceed cautiously. Someone has wisely said, "Do not remove a fence until you learn why it was put there." An incoming pastor is wise to be cautious about making radical changes in policies or procedures set in place by his or her predecessor. If radical changes are made, a pastor may quickly discover the reason those policies and procedures were put into effect. George O. Wood, general superintendent for the General Council of the Assemblies of God, observes: "There are at least three kinds of predecessors in a pastorate: (1) those who do well, (2) those who did so-so (the church neither grew nor declined), and (3) those who leave a mess" (Wood 2004, 64).

Jesus said, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Always look for the good in your fellow ministers. Affirm them whenever possible to your board, staff members, and the congregation. Treat them with kindness. Sometimes there are reasonable concerns that must be discussed. That is always something to be done in a confidential setting, a board meeting, or a meeting with district leadership.

Why should we not compare ourselves to others?

All members of the meeting must understand that confidentiality is required. This is best modeled by you. Rehashing a meeting where someone else is not doing so well may give you a momentary false sense of affirmation. Comparing ourselves with others' shortcomings is not a good habit to start.

Integrity is not so much the way things seem to be, or ought to be; integrity has to do with the way one acts. Engstrom and Larson (1987) define integrity as "doing what you said you would do." Jesus taught this principle in the Sermon on the Mount: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' be 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37).

Recognizing a breach in your integrity is simple. It is when your actions do not line up with your talk. We often hear the first half of Matthew 5:37, but we do not spend much time on the second half, "anything beyond this comes from the evil one." Remember our definition of integrity, "whole, sound, unimpaired." Once there is a break in the wall, all manner of evil can slip in.

Do you do what you said you would do? You promised to be faithful to your mate. Are you faithful to your mate? You promised the Lord you would give Him the glory if He ever used you in a significant way. He is now using you in a significant way. Does He get the glory? Let us imagine you promised one of your children that on Saturday you and he would do something special, no matter what. On Friday an opportunity comes up that is huge—something for Saturday and it has potential to make a lot of money for you. But your son believed your word. Integrity says that you keep your promise with your son. Integrity is not complicated. It means simply doing what you said you would do. To make a promise is a holy thing. People of integrity keep their word.

You are the only one inside your skin. You are the only person in your sphere of influence, your realm of responsibility. There is no other you! You decide if your yes is yes and your no is no. Jesus said it is just that simple! Our job is to keep out the evil one, keep the wall whole, complete, and unimpaired.

Daniel 6 gives a picture of a man all alone in his crowd. It is a significant illustration of integrity. It provides details that demonstrate difficult decisions and choices that changed lives. King Darius saw in Daniel the possibility of protection from corrupted officials in his kingdom. Darius appointed 120 officers over his whole kingdom. He placed three commissioners over the 120 officers, and then placed himself over the three.

Accountability was structured so that Darius could guard against being financially or ethically cheated. It appears that Daniel had already distinguished himself in small things because King Darius placed him in the upper echelon of responsibility. Once in a position of influence and authority, Daniel grew in the esteem of King Darius who planned to promote him. "Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom" (Daniel 6:3).

The king's plans did not set well with Daniel's colleagues, so they began to plot against him. "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent" (Daniel 6:4).

I love that! This king was quick to see the value of a man with integrity. The king planned to appoint Daniel over the entire kingdom. I am sure King Darius was pleased with himself, thinking, "I believe I have got the man. I know who will be my personal assistant. I know who will be second in command, the prime minister over all my kingdom."

Indicate three principles that protect your integrity.

When your level of position and authority rises, it is wise to remember the clever story of the mother whale who told the baby whale, “When you get to the top and start spouting off, that is the time you are most likely to be harpooned.”

How might advancement in ministry bring greater risk to your integrity?

Certain temptations are connected with promotion to higher positions, such as the office of pastor, presbyter, or missionary. Your own heart and mind become vulnerable and must be protected. In self-defense strategies, the principle of preparedness is key. Consider the simple strategies women are taught when approaching a parked car at night. Walk with purpose, do not stroll. Look in the backseat before you open the door. Have your keys out. Some even suggest that you hold the keys between your fingers, pointing outward so that they become an instant defense weapon.

Swindoll reminds us that some people live for the day when they will be in a place of authority. I want to warn you before it happens; there will be a unique test connected to it. It will challenge your integrity, so now is the time to prepare.

Life’s choices are few. Time passes. You earn the respect of others. You prove yourself to be a person who can be trusted. Before long, you are promoted and placed in a position of responsibility and influence. You may be at the head of a ministry.

People begin to quote you and put you on a pedestal. Watch out! At that point, life becomes very complicated. Consider what the prophet Jeremiah teaches, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:9–10). So, if the heart is deceitful and we really cannot understand it, then what are we to do? “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

When my wife and I visited Peking, China, we learned that many Chinese keep at least one duck in their yard because of the duck’s inhospitable quack whenever anyone comes around. It alerts the people at home to the presence of an intruder. In earlier centuries, the warlords would take their ducks along to their battle camps to serve as sentries to warn of an enemy seeking to penetrate the camp.

There are so many enemies of a faithful life that quietly and deceitfully seek the holes in your integrity to enter your affections and turn your spirit away from the real battle. We need a faithful sentry!

What are three principles that will protect our integrity?

Three principles for protecting integrity follow:

1. **Do not bargain with truth.** Honor the truth and the truth will honor you! God’s Word is a how-to manual for maintaining your integrity. Therefore, “put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm” (Proverbs 4:24–26).
“Perversity” in verse 24, means to deliberately deviate from what is good. There is no fine line. Simply, “keep corrupt talk far from your lips.” The break in the wall may come from the inside when your own words punch holes in your integrity.
2. **Keep your eyes straight ahead.** I remember sitting in a classroom among students taking a test and hearing the teacher repeat, “Keep your eyes straight ahead. No looking around.” I guarantee it will get you in trouble. You will see that someone else is finishing faster and compare yourself. You will see that someone else has a different answer and change yours or that you do not know the answers, so you copy from the student next to you. Keep your eyes straight ahead.
3. **Consider where you are going and how you will get there.** Do not take that shortcut through quicksand. Stay on firm, tested, level ground. It may be the long way around, but the risk is great. Listen to the sound of God’s Word, the sentry for your heart!

Swindoll gives a careful warning for those promoted to places of responsibility, like Daniel. Temptations will come. You may be tempted to cut corners—to sweep it under the rug—to look the other way to keep people happy and not to make waves. Stop it! Deal with it! Your people hold you in the highest trust. Do not take advantage of that trust. Hold that trust ever so tenderly. David writes this prayer in Psalm 25: “Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you” (vv. 20–21).

Lesson 12.3 Hard Times and Integrity

Identify principles for maintaining integrity in adversity.

Darius appointed Daniel over his kingdom because he saw in him a spirit of excellence! One might think that when promotion comes, then adversity stops. Wrong. The commissioners and politicians tried to find grounds for an accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs. No matter how hard they tried, they could find no reason to accuse Daniel. They could not find

even a small evidence of corruption. They followed him, had their spies watch him, and talked to people about him. They checked his records and audited every detail of his life, only to find that Daniel was financially, morally, and ethically clean.

Would that happen in your life if someone went behind the scenes and studied your affairs, your books, and your work? This is what was said of Daniel when he was investigated: “Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God’ ” (Daniel 6:5).

Adversity grew, and they finally caught Daniel doing the thing that he loved the most. They plotted out a scheme that resulted in their finding Daniel on his knees in prayer to God. He had refused to exalt Darius as the chief authority of the world.

It is important to understand *why* Daniel went to the lion’s den. It is not because he had done something wrong. It was because he had done something right! This indicates that even when you conduct your life and do that which is right, you may still wind up attacked, hated, and forgotten. But do it anyway. Press on. Do not allow those behind the attacks and criticism to distract you from your mission. When you leave the task at hand to argue, you lose valuable time that may be better used for the church. I am reminded of Abraham Lincoln’s words:

If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what’s said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference. (Lincoln as cited in Carpenter 1995, 258–259)

I am impressed with Swindoll’s two principles for difficult times. First, true integrity means you do what is right when no one is looking as well as when everyone is compromising and especially when the attacks come.

Several years ago the Statue of Liberty underwent major repairs. Those who took her apart and examined her were impressed all over again with the sculpture and the French artist who first built her. The detail that went into the top of her hair and the spiked crown was so exquisite that you would have thought everybody in the world would have been examining her. But when they built this statue she was to stand over 150 feet tall. There was no such thing as a helicopter to hover over her. Only sea gulls would notice. Yet, when you are committed to excellence, it does not matter if anybody looks and appreciates your work.

Psychologists tell us we have intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators make a person do something because he or she wants it to be right. Extrinsic motivators urge people to do things because someone else is watching. We search our hearts and minds and ask ourselves, “What am I doing when no one is looking?” It is just as important to do right when nobody is watching as it is to behave right when everybody is watching!

Furthermore, the lines of integrity must stay in place whether the test is adversity or prosperity. There is no promotion so lofty that you will compromise. There is no depth that will cause you to throw aside your integrity. Integrity guards your thoughts and actions whether your goal is to survive or to move towards greater influence in your ministry. Daniel did not compromise when his very survival was on the line. His integrity held.

Explain what is required to restore integrity.

Humans are given the right to choose to live without integrity. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” You can choose that way, but the end result will be spiritual famine and death. It is not the way intended for you by your Creator.

What happens when integrity is lost? First, let us think about that question. Is integrity lost? You may not have money or fame, but you have the possibility of building character. Integrity is the moral fiber of your character. It is built with careful attention to detail; it is maintained by your guarding it and making regular repairs. It may require that you go back to someone you have wronged, coming to terms with what caused the erosion.

When is my integrity in the most danger?

Moral failures that result in devastating harm to individuals, families, churches, and communities always start with small cracks in a person’s integrity. Recent statistics from the Assemblies of God Fellowship indicate that 1.5 ministers for every thousand U.S. ministers were dismissed for moral failure in 2005 (Assemblies of God Statistics). The risk is real. We are most in danger when we begin to believe that we are above such risk. We are most in danger when our pride paints over an inward flaw. Remember King David? His moral failure cost his family dearly and cost his kingdom great loss. The effect was felt across the land and across generations. Erosion of your integrity can open the door to widespread devastation.

God’s Word instructs us to confess our failures, our sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God’s Word also instructs us in how to respond to those around us with failures. “If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness” (Psalm 130:3–4). “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

It is never too late to start doing what is right. “The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight” (Proverbs 11:1). If there are areas in your life where you are not using truth to measure everything, you are experiencing an erosion of integrity. Confess your past and present failures and lay your lives before God so that He might direct you to come to terms with what has broken your life apart.

John Gardner (1984) writes, “The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.” Are you a plumber? Plumb with excellence. Are you a carpenter? Build with excellence. Are you a mechanic? Work with your hands excellently. Are you in the ministry? Do excellent work. Study, prepare, pray, wait, and trust. Do not pull strings; do not manipulate your way up. Let God take care of the progress. Just do excellent work. Even if only the sea gulls notice!¹³

¹³ T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 141–149.

Chapter 13 Moral Failure

Over the past three decades, the church has found itself in the headlines due to tragedies within its walls. The failures of leaders who had achieved prominence demonstrated that their lives did not live up to the live-changing message they preached. While the media may seem to take pleasure in these types of stories, there is an inherent sense, even among those who are far from God, that ministerial failures are not right and they should not occur.

While many professions labor under an assumed code of conduct, none is held to the standard that ministry personnel must adhere to. People who have yet to express interest in God or His claims on their lives still join in the shock and disillusionment when another well-known minister fails. In fact, all that is really changing is the level of shock. The number of failures remains consistent, leaving the concern that other ministers are not learning from the mistakes of their peers who have stumbled.

Most Christians understand the heart-breaking reality that a lifetime of good deeds can be undermined by a weekend of stupidity. God's people in all levels of service should be aware of their teetering testimony and how their failures can confuse those who are searching. Christians who do not remain on their guard could cause the fledgling to falter. How much more so the minister who has been entrusted to lead the charge in demonstrating the life of God before congregation and community? When a minister falls, the fallout can spread exponentially. The good he or she has done can be undone in a moment, leaving a tragic hole where that leader once built meaningful influence. This tragedy develops all because of a choice or two that led to a few dozen more that ultimately crossed a line that the Christian leader had pledged never to cross.

Where does moral failure begin? How can it be stopped, and how can a Christian recover when it is not stopped? These are the questions explored in this chapter—questions every minister should be prepared to answer.

Lesson 13.1 Cracks in Integrity

Objectives

13.1.1 Describe the best strategies to avoid moral failure.

13.1.2 Indicate strategies for maintaining spiritual and sexual purity.

13.1.3 Examine consequences of moral failure.

Lesson 13.2 Restoration

Objectives

13.2.1 Suggest ideal conduct for those around the fallen minister.

13.2.2 Outline a plan for restoration.

Lesson 13.1 Cracks in Integrity

I was standing on the corner waiting for my ride home, feeling a little irritated by the delay and thinking of all the important things I could be doing. A small butterfly landed briefly on the toe of

my shoe. Such direct contact captured my attention and pulled me away from my frustration. It reminded me of the principle involved in the *butterfly effect*, which says that a small change in one part of a complex system can have a large effect somewhere else. The term, *butterfly effect*, posits that the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could set off a Tornado in Texas. The essential theory is that one thing leads to another, and that leads to another. Thus, there are no incidental motions in God's universe or in our lives!

As I considered the implication, I saw my wife's car turn the corner. My frown became a smile, accompanied by a hug and kiss. That little butterfly had changed my mood. When my wife began with apologies for keeping me waiting, I winked at her and told of my wonderful time with the Creator.

We all encounter seemingly insignificant experiences in our everyday lives, but those moments have the potential to change our lives and those around us for eternity. Like the principle of the butterfly effect, the path to moral failure starts with little things.

What types of misconduct are typically most associated with the idea of moral failure?

Moral failure is a term most frequently used for sexual or financial misconduct. In reality, the term can be applied to any failure to maintain our ethics and moral values. A lack of honesty is at the root of every moral failure. It often begins *not* with the lies we tell others, but with the lies we tell ourselves. "I am so overworked that I deserve a little fun. I will just take a couple of hours to go see that risqué movie. It is just entertainment." Or, "It doesn't really matter. I work hard; I should be able to use my money the way I want to. If I were not such a good speaker, the offerings would not be so good." Moral failures always start with small cracks in a person's integrity.

Describe the best strategies to avoid moral failure.

Ministers must adhere to a high ethical standard of moral values. Writing down your own code of ethics is a personal strategy for maintaining professional integrity. You can make clear decisions now that will help you when faced with future moral choices.

To maintain your integrity means that you guard your heart and mind to keep them whole, undivided, and intact. The first step is to carefully build fences. The second is to keep the fences strong. If the walls of defense that protect you fall into disrepair, you expose yourself to risk.

A comparison of the lives of Joseph and David is a good lesson. Review the stories found in Genesis 39 and 2 Samuel 11. Study the choices that Joseph made. The following paragraphs encapsulate what I learned from these passages.

Run now. Do not wait around to see if your suspicions are correct. Do not second guess yourself and wonder if you are reading into the situation; just run!

Delay gratification. David forgot the importance of waiting, and his desire for instant gratification was his own defeat. Learn to say *no*.

Avoid secrecy. It is poison to your system. Temptation feeds on secrecy, deception, and denial. Do not do anything you would not want to share with your spouse or best friend.

Refuse to be deceived. Delusion must be broken because it is the basis of sexual temptation. Satan is the father of lies and the deceiver. He targets men with lies about their ability to control hormones and exploits women's cravings for comfort and affirmation. Resistance is critical. Decide to reject the lie before you are faced with the temptation.

Reject misplaced sexual fantasies. Resist dwelling on thoughts about sexual pleasure apart from marriage. Choose to direct your thoughts into healthy areas. Stay away from daydreams. Also, a growing area of concern with the internet is the ease of accessing pornography. Pornography draws your thoughts into unhealthy areas. It feeds the delusions and lies. It creates a false understanding of God's gift of sexuality to humanity. Pornography is degrading to *both* women and men. There is a growing area of research about the changes it makes in an individual's mind that leads to addiction. God is not the only one who knows every time someone opens a pornographic website. Technology is so advanced that it keeps score of each site. Webmasters know all about what happens on the sites they manage. Nothing on the Internet is done in secret. If this is an area of concern for you, stop now and call for help. An Assemblies of God helpline for ministers is already in place: 800-867-4011.

Beware of flattery, flirtation, and suggestive behavior. Avoid conversation that reveals intimacies that belong to your spouse alone. Flirtation is flattery with a seductive intent. Proverbs warns against flattery and the seductress.

My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your kinsman; they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words. (Proverbs 7:1–5)

Dressed to Seduce

Dear friend, do what I tell you; treasure my careful instructions. Do what I say and you'll live well. My teaching is as precious as your eyesight—guard it! Write it out on the back of your hands; etch it on the chambers of your heart. Talk to Wisdom as to a sister. Treat Insight as your companion. They'll be with you to fend off the Temptress—that smooth-talking, honey-tongued Seductress. (Proverbs 7:1–5, *The Message Bible*)

What is the first place that must be guarded?

Establish places of safety. The first treasure that must be guarded is your marriage. Protect your marriage. If you must visit or counsel someone of the opposite sex, take your spouse with you or arrange to have someone else at the office and keep your door open. Be very cautious about touching. Your intentions may be pure, but they can be misinterpreted and lead the other party to initiate flirting. When you give a compliment, do it in an impersonal manner. For example say this: "That is a bright and cheerful outfit," *not* "You look great in that outfit!"

Assure your spouse that he or she is your only love! Say it over and over and over again. Live it in your actions. Do not take church business home with you. Protect your spouse and never take advantage of the easy laughs you can get at his or her expense.

Find the way of escape. The way of escape is provided for you. There is always a window. Learn to be aware of things that could trigger your vulnerability. Is it when you have had more than your fill of criticisms? Or at the end of a stressful day? Is it being reminded of or remembering a certain person other than your spouse?

Following are several more Scripture passages on fleeing temptation. Because of their value to us, they are worth the space to include them in this chapter.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22–24)

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:17–25)

But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. (Romans 7:17–25, *The Message Bible*)

If we know we have an appointment to tell another person, an accountability partner, what we did, it will reinforce our resolve to keep our commitment to high standards.

Indicate strategies for maintaining spiritual and sexual purity.

The Message Bible communicates very clearly the link between spiritual and sexual purity in the following passage:

You know the next commandment pretty well, too: “Don’t go to bed with another’s spouse.” But don’t think you’ve preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.

Let’s not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here’s what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have to chop off your right hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump. (Matthew 5:27–30)

Which of the ten guidelines do you find most important for your own life and why?

It could not possibly be said better. You must consider the risk for moral failure in ministry. Take it seriously and discipline yourself to be on guard. Remember these guidelines:

1. Recognize your vulnerability.
2. Guard your heart.
3. Guard your mind.
4. Guard your marriage.
5. Guard your computer monitor.
6. Guard your ministry.
7. Guard your health.
8. Recognize and address the warning signs.
9. Hold yourself accountable to others.
10. Regularly rehearse the consequences.

Examine consequences of moral failure.

Consider this very realistic scenario. The sun was long gone by the time the young pastor arrived home, but there was not even one light on inside his house. As he stepped into the empty darkness, he felt another wave of despair. His world was crashing all around him.

The board meeting had been ugly, but he had been to difficult board meetings before and he had always come home to a family who loved him; he had come home to laughing and playing. But this time they were gone. His wife had packed up what she needed that morning and had driven three hours to her parents. She had left a note, asking him to call the elementary school to tell them that Sarah and David would not be returning to classes. His family was gone. His church had fired him. He sat in the darkness and wept.

This story has happened countless times. The consequences are far beyond the personal anguish of one person. Consider King David's fall.

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' " (2 Samuel 12:7–10)

Why did David fail to consider the consequences of his actions when he chose to sin with Bathsheba?

When we review the story in 2 Samuel 12, we are faced with the magnitude of the consequences of David's moral failure. What if David had stopped to consider the consequences of his actions? Here is a list of consequences he ultimately faced for failing to count the cost of his moral failure.

1. David lost his own self respect.
2. David's reputation was tarnished.
3. He disappointed God.
4. David became desperate to cover up his sins. Sin leads to more sin.
5. Uriah was killed. David became a murderer.
6. Bathsheba was taken into the king's palace as a pregnant widow. It would be hard to imagine the anguish caused by David's actions.
7. Prophet Nathan, the religious leadership of the day, confronted David.
8. David's home was divided.
9. David gave God's enemies a reason to show the Lord contempt.
10. Shame and suffering came to David's household and to his kingdom.
11. David suffered public humiliation when his rebellious son, Absalom, publicly went in to his father's wives and concubines to demonstrate his rebellion to the nation (2 Samuel 16:20–22).

God said that the sword would not depart from David's family. God would raise up adversity against David from within his family.

As an exercise to remind you of this reality, I highly recommend you write a personal list of twenty consequences that you would face in a moral failure. That is hard to do, I know. But when you apply the butterfly effect principle, the consequences can go far beyond your own world. Your choices affect your spouse, your children, your siblings, your parents, your grandparents, family, and friends. Your choices can ultimately affect the life of a missionary reaching the lost, thousands of miles from your home.

Lesson 13.2 Restoration

Suggest ideal conduct for those around the fallen minister.

In ministry we may hear of another's failure, or we may suffer a moral failure within our own circle of coworkers. I offer these strategies to process and handle the hard news of a spiritual failure.

What should you do when you hear of the moral failure of a fellow minister?

- Keep your balance. The situation may give you good reason to feel panic, but put what you hear and know in perspective. A real, transparent part of life is discovering that people are not perfect. Put your own sense of propriety and rightness into focus with the issue. This issue is something that can and will be righteously dealt with by other of God's servants whose role is to ensure that moral fidelity is not compromised.
- Out of disclosures will come a correction of the issues revealed. As Christians, we have a basic sense that integrity and honesty are values that should rule decisions. Dishonesty can never, must never, defeat honesty. Remember the words of Proverbs 11:1: "The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight."
- Leadership now has an opportunity to address the trouble. Good people in places of leadership at times of crisis are a gift. Their value must not be underestimated. They need support and freedom to do their work of reconciliation.
- The congregation now has the opportunity to prove its maturity and strength. The scriptural teaching of body ministry will probably never be more important in its practical application than in times like these of trouble within the body.

- You will have many opportunities for “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) to fulfill the law of Christ. But Galatians 6:1 says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Accusation, anger, and making sure a caught person gets what is coming to him or her may come to mind first. When we have been betrayed, manipulated, and sinned against, we may not want to give mercy to the offender. However, the principle of restitution is biblical and appropriate; the principle of Christians bearing the burdens of other Christians is also biblical, as well as central to our faith. When sin leads to grief then repentance then to an appeal for forgiveness, a great responsibility rests on those of us who are called upon to restore a fallen brother or sister.
- Keep in check and proper perspective your suspicion that people may not be doing enough to correct the errors. We may think the restorers are not being as thorough as we would be or are not bringing the right judgments to the sin. We should keep these feelings to ourselves. Our natural tendency when these sins of dishonesty and betrayal are revealed is to imagine immediately other areas in this person’s life that are most likely filled with sin and betrayal also. This thought among Christians must be harnessed so that the sin that has occurred and the repentance that has been offered can be processed as cleanly as possible. If additional disclosures come or if repentance is incomplete, then that can be dealt with in an appropriate way at another time. But for now, trust the work being done by those responsible for bringing accountability to the situation.

This is an opportunity to see clearly the path that leads to sin. We can have no pleasure in seeing the devastating effects of sin on another person. God will teach us lessons of righteousness and humility through an example of failure. Seeing God do a work of restoration is, in fact, a wonderful thing. The Word encourages us all:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. (Romans 5:20)

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. (Psalm 130:3–4)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

We must thank God that He is at work renewing broken lives and bringing healing and wholeness to His church. The essential work of God in the world is to discover, through the Holy Spirit’s conviction, people in whom He can work, sinners whom He can convert, Christians whom He can restore, and churches where His restoring grace can bring light from the darkness. The Holy Spirit can work through us to bring life where death has been and integrity where unreliability has ruled. With the Holy Spirit, we can rescue a godly reputation from a dishonoring scandal. Remember that the work of Christ is being done. Remember that His people are supported by His loyal love. Remember that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. Remember that God builds His church with imperfect people, sinful ones, who receive membership into His body because they have placed their sins at the foot of the Cross.

We now must have an open commitment to the future, to the new leader whom God will send, and to the people who will be born into God’s family. This is not the time to back away but to

close ranks; this is not the time to put a defiant fist into the air, but to extend your hand to one another in friendship and support. The moment is here for you to *be* what you are called to be and what you have been saved to be—that is, a healing member of the body of Christ.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:25–32)

Outline a plan for restoration.

Things did not look good for King David. In fact, *hopeless* might be a good word to describe his situation. Yet, look at this conversation in 2 Samuel 12:13: “Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.’ ” God has a way back; He has a plan for your situation.

Why should a restoration plan be made available to those who fall?

I receive lots of letters, but few more meaningful than one that came to me recently. One of our ministers was caught in a moral tangle. The culprit was Internet pornography. As events unfolded, he confessed, repented, and came under a restorative disciplinary process. His humility and response has been exemplary. Here are excerpts of his letter:

I have contemplated carefully my experience over the past year. Some of the lessons I have learned are ones that the Lord has been trying to teach me throughout my life. Even though these will seem somewhat basic to you, I wanted to share with you what God is doing in my life and to once again thank you and the presbytery for your gracious and godly leadership.

Here are some things I have learned:

- I always need a close confidant and friend who can provide a *safe place* for anything and everything to be discussed and confessed with permanent confidentiality, so that I know this information is always *privileged* information.

- I must give this friend authority, and he must possess the determination to confront and challenge me as necessary, even when it is painful for both and especially if a broader confession and accountability is needed.
- I must always confess sin quickly and completely. Hide nothing. Sin flourishes undercover but cannot survive in the light.
- I should discuss my spiritual walk and my ministry goals *regularly* and often with my partners and/or superiors in ministry.
- The key ingredients to spiritual success are hard work and singular focus.
- Innocence does not become virtue until it is tested and tried. Character is developed only through testing.
- I must *expect* and be ready for the test at all times.
- High moral boundaries are not optional for an effective Christian leader, specifically in relating to the opposite sex and what I allow into my mind through viewing, reading, and thought life.
- I should never form a habit that I would not want *everyone* knowing about.
- As a single male, I need close personal relationships and activities with other single men for encouragement and accountability.
- I will never downplay the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Always obey, even when it is painful, inconvenient, or seemingly trivial.
- I will seek out mentors and their critique of my needed improvements.
- I do not work well alone. I need associates and ministerial relationships that have common or similar goals.

His letter concluded with these words: “Thank you for your continual prayers for my ministry and my character with which I will always live the lessons He teaches.”

I read his letter and felt thankful that our God is a redeeming and loving God who gives individuals another chance. Leaders like this who fall can grow again and serve again. When they do, they hold a great treasure in their hands: healthy moral insight, courage, and a renewed heart. God bless him, and all those like him!

The Assemblies of God has a two-year rehabilitation program that is available to those ministers who are willing to complete the process. However, it does not always result in restoration to full-time ministry. A better strategy is prevention. Consider this “Covenant of Clergy Sexual Ethics” (*Enrichment* 2004, 50), with the suggestion that signed covenants be kept by ministers and copies be given to church officers:

Preamble

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, called by God to proclaim the gospel and gifted by the Spirit to minister to the church, I dedicate myself to conduct my ministry according to the ethical guidelines and principles set forth in Scripture and this covenant, in order that my ministry may be acceptable to God, my service beneficial to the Christian community, and my life a witness to the world.

Covenant

As a minister called to serve God and God’s people, I commit myself to the following norms of ethical conduct, for which I am accountable to God, to my colleagues in ministry, and to the church in which I serve.

I will demonstrate sexual integrity in ministry by understanding, respecting, and observing the boundaries of sexual misconduct as defined above.

I will nurture my physical, emotional, and spiritual health, maintain enriching friendships, and build strong relationships with my spouse and family.

I will develop relationships with God, my spouse, and close friends who encourage accountability and protect against temptation.

I will recognize the special power afforded me in the pastoral office by never abusing that power in ways that violate the personhood of another human being, by assuming responsibility for maintaining proper boundaries in church staff/church member relationships, and by acknowledging that the congregant is always in a vulnerable position.

I will avoid all forms of sexual exploitation and/or harassment in my professional and social relationships, even if others invite such behavior or involvement.

I will not seek or accept sexual favors.

I will exercise good judgment in professional and private conduct by avoiding situations that create the appearance of sexual misconduct.

I will assume responsibility to report any reliable evidence of sexual misconduct by another minister to the appropriate person or committee.

I will submit to the policies and procedures of the church when an allegation of sexual misconduct has been made, recognizing the importance of justice and due process procedures.

Conclusion

As I seek to fulfill my responsibilities as a minister, I will strive to embody servant-leadership in all my relationships and to pattern my life and ministry after the example of Jesus Christ.

Signed _____

Date _____

Consequences of a Moral Fall

Whenever I feel particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation, I find it helpful to review what effects my actions could have.

Make a list here of at least twenty ways your moral failure could affect your life.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
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- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.¹⁴

¹⁴ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 150–161.

Chapter 14 Discouragement and Depression

The story is told of a little boy who took a seat on a park bench next to a man dressed neatly in a dark suit. The boy watched the man, noticing the sour look on his face, and finally asked, “Are you sick, Mister?” The man replied, “No son, I am a minister.” That is an amusing illustration unless you are a minister.

Great pressure is placed on the minister to always be on top of the game. He or she has to be ready with insights and comfort when the panicked call comes at two o’clock in the morning. The minister has to be prepared at all times, meaning he or she should be ready to sparkle with truth and wit whenever called upon, regardless of warning. He or she has to be a peacemaker in whatever wars others generate. And the minister should smile always, revealing the joy of the Lord and the irrepressible joy of His calling. Anything less might cause someone to question the veracity of that calling.

But ministers get discouraged, even depressed. In fact, the most well-known of ministers seem to face the largest doses of self-doubt and crippling melancholy. If you have been launched into ministry expecting to walk on clouds every day, you will soon come face-to-face with a darkness that will tarnish your halo. Simply put, ministers face dark days of depression in their lives.

Once you get past the shock of experiencing depression, you need to understand the depression and how to journey through its long hallways. This chapter is about learning how to cope with depression’s devastation. To chart a course through its stormy waters is knowledge no minister can afford to be without. You will also come to see how God responds mercifully in such times and seeks to provide us with exactly what we need. Jesus understands human emotions from experience, even the emotions that come in deep travail. If you are there right now, He is your ally. If you are not there, equip yourself with the truth you will need when it is your turn in the valley of the depression.

Lesson 14.1 Depression and the Minister

Objectives

- 14.1.1 Explain the risk of depression in the life and ministry of a pastor.
- 14.1.2 Identify the causes of depression in Paul’s life and God’s response to him.
- 14.1.3 Discuss the relationship between anxiety and depression.

Lesson 14.2 Friends

Objectives

- 14.2.1 Give an example of God’s help for Paul.
- 14.2.2 Explain the meaning of affirmation.

Lesson 14.1 Depression and the Minister

Explain the risk of depression in the life and ministry of a pastor.

On an unforgettable Sunday morning in 1866, the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon shocked his congregation when, from the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he announced, “I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fierce that I hope none of you ever get to the extremes of wretchedness that I go.”

Those are amazing words from one who some have considered to be the greatest preacher since the apostle Paul. Spurgeon knew the depths of depression.

John Henry Jowett, a brilliant preacher of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City and Westminster Chapel in London, wrote to a friend in 1920, “You seem to imagine that I have no ups or downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky” (Jowett as quoted in *Why Do I Feel* 2006).

G. F. Barber, the biographer of Alexander Whyte, described Whyte as one of the greatest preachers Scotland ever had. But “resolute as was Dr. Whyte, he had seasons of deep depression regarding the results of his work in the pulpit and among his people.”

Then there is G. Campbell Morgan, who from the pulpit of his pastorate, the Westminster Chapel in London, remarked on the tenth anniversary, “During these years I have known more of visions fading into mirages, of purposes failing of fulfillment, of things of strength crumbling into weakness than ever before.”

Martin Luther, also, would go into such dark depressions that he would lock himself in his room. His family would lock up all sharp instruments and things with which he could hurt himself. It is said that in the midst of one of those depressions, his wife Catherine came in. She was dressed in her mourning black. Looking up startled, Luther said to her, “Well, who died?” She replied sharply, “Well, the way you are acting, you would think God had died!”

The reality is that sometimes godly believers, those who have set their sights on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, know despair. Those who have gone through it, who have climbed pinnacles that perhaps you and I will never attain, will sometimes know difficulty, troubles, despair, and depression.

Why might a minister feel he or she has to hide personal times of depression?

And some of us, too, experience such darkness. It is not really the *in* thing to admit that, but you know how it is. You have been so depressed, and your chin has been hanging so low that it is almost rug-burned. You have not had a positive thought from morning until night; then the phone rings. You do not want to answer the phone, so you let it ring. But it might be an emergency, so

you pick it up and say, “Good morning. Oh, yes, this is a beautiful day that the Lord has made. God bless you too!” Clunk. Frown. Heavy sigh.

Identify the causes of depression in Paul’s life and God’s response to him.

Depression has been called the common cold of human experience. Second Corinthians 7 shows a depressed apostle Paul. That is the word that he uses to describe himself. Literally the word means “lowly” or “cast down.”

The apostle Paul, who is usually so buoyant, so powerful, so aggressive, and so positive, is depressed. But Paul does not hide his feelings. He is honest. I doubt that anyone is going to have difficulty relating to Paul’s struggle with depression. But I will offer a word of caution before we look together at this common human problem. I am not referring to what is called *primary* or *clinical* depression, something that is caused by heredity or chemical imbalance. Rather, I am talking about common, everyday, periodic depression that most of us have experienced. What I will be saying here does not give all the answers, but it does offer a substantial beginning.

What led the apostle Paul to depression?

So the question is this: Why was the apostle Paul down? The answer is given in 2 Corinthians 7:5: “For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within.” Paul was saying that he had been so troubled that he had been brought to the place of exhaustion. Biblical expositor and theologian Charles Hodge explained that Paul had been under attack by Jews and Gentiles seeking his life.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul noted, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.” Hodge says that the words used here picture a beast of burden so overloaded that he cannot take another step, so he falls under his load.

How is Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings 19 similar?

Though it is universally acknowledged that fatigue is the cause of depression, in common experience, this knowledge is universally forgotten. I do not think that any of the prophets in the Scriptures had more strength than Elijah. We thrill as Elijah stands before the priests of Baal and taunts them, “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is god!” (1 Kings 18:27). Elijah stands strong before those people, and you remember how he defeats them in a resounding victory.

Elijah must have been in good shape, too, because we know he tucked his belt into his cloak and outran Ahab's chariot to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46). That was eighteen miles. Elijah was a tough prophet in every way. Yet, an amazing thing happened. Jezebel threatened his life: "Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them'" (1 King 19:1–2).

And what was the response of Elijah, the courageous man of God? "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beer Sheba in Judah he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life, I am no better than my ancestors'" (vv. 3–4).

Why, after this great victory, is a man with so much starch, courage, and charismatic talent in such despair? He was worn out, not only from the marathon run to Jezreel, but also from the tremendous emotional and spiritual tension of battling for the Lord and winning the victory.

Notice that the Lord sends an angel to take care of Elijah; the angel tells him simply to take a long, restful nap. Exhaustion can make a coward and depression-prone personality out of anybody. It is easy to fantasize about how rugged we are—the Bionic Man, Wonder Woman, or super student. We need to be brought face-to-face with realities.

Following is a brief test with a scale of one to five: five indicates you are at the top, and one means you are at the bottom. Your goal is to achieve a five.

About your capabilities,

- a five leaps tall buildings in a single bound,
- a four must take a running start to leap over the buildings,
- a three can leap over only short buildings,
- a two crashes into buildings when attempting to leap, and
- a one cannot recognize buildings at all.

Or consider your spirituality:

- a five talks directly with God,
- a four talks with angels,
- a three talks to himself or herself,
- a two argues with himself or herself,
- a one loses those arguments.

The point is that our ministry zeal or Pentecostal piety sometimes makes us vulnerable to feeling that we have superhuman qualities. But, of course, we are of flesh, and we get depressed. One reason is that our flesh sometimes gets no rest.

Paul offers another reason for his weakness: "But we were harassed at every turn" (2 Corinthians 7:5). *The Message Bible* says, "The fights in the church and the fears in our hearts kept us on pins and needles." The words *harassed* or *afflicted* mean literally "pressured and squeezed." Everywhere Paul turned there were pressures: people pressures, church pressures, and relationship pressures. He was not only exhausted, but he had tremendous pressures.

Verse 5 also indicates there were conflicts on the outside. Literally, there were fightings on the outside. Conflicts that you could see and witness! Later on, Paul has his dukes up and is ready to go at it. He gives a list of what he has gone through, beginning in 2 Corinthians 11:6, but his specific focus begins in verses 23–27.

I've worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' 39 lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in open sea for a night and a day. And hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather. (*The Message Bible*)

In those verses, Paul presents a litany of abuses that he has undergone. He knew about fighting, harassments, and afflictions on the outside.

Anxiety

Discuss the relationship between anxiety and depression.

Paul mentions also “fears within” (2 Corinthians 7:5). His fears were of the assault of Satan upon his work. In 2 Corinthians 11:28–29, after listing his struggles, pains, and agonies of physical hardship, he adds: “And that’s not the half of it, when you throw in the daily pressures, anxieties of all the churches, and someone gets to the end of his rope, I feel the desperation in my bones. When someone is duped into sin, an angry fire burns in my gut” (*The Message Bible*).

He talks about being beaten and pushed around, but he says that apart from such external things, there is that daily pressure upon him that is of concern for all the churches. Paul said in Galatians 4:11: “I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” Here is concern for his people. He tells the believers in Thessalonica: “For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless” (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Paul underwent tremendous exhaustive pressures about the fights in the church, messy things that hurt the witness of the church and discouraged the heart of the pastor.

How would you define anxiety?

What are the volcanic things in your heart that may be devastating? At times believers come to a nervous collapse. Often it is because they have been holding in anxieties and have not dealt with reality, so they finally come to the place where they implode. Then they cannot believe what is happening to them.

We need to get over the angelic never-despair, never-have-a-problem, always up-up-up fallacy. We are not angels. One of these days we will never get tired and worn out again, but that is not now in this life. We need to empty ourselves of the angelic fallacy.

Why does caring more make the minister more vulnerable?

If you love Jesus, then you are going to stretch yourself. And sometimes you will become worn out. If you love Jesus, your heart is already expanded as it holds a world full of compassion and ministry as you truly care about others.

Philips Brooks, a notable preacher in American history and at one time Bishop of Boston, said,

To be a true minister of men is always to accept new happiness and new distress. The man who gives himself to other men can never wholly be a sad man, but no more can he be a man of unclouded gladness. To him shall come, with ever deeper consecration, untasted joy, but in the same cup shall be mixed sorrow that it was beyond his power to feel before.

The bigger our hearts, the greater the potential will be for difficulties. The more you care, the more you are vulnerable. Do we want to care? The answer is obvious: absolutely, we want to care! We do not want to build a wall to protect our hearts.

Do we want to have an enlarged heart like the apostle Paul? He may have had heart trouble because he cared for it all; his flesh had no rest. He was afflicted, harassed on every side, “conflicts on the outside and fears within” (2 Corinthians 7:5). If he had not gone for it all, his life still would have been good, but he would never have known the things that he knew here. He would have never known the index of difficulties and stresses that he knew because he loved Jesus. The apostle Paul went for it all!

Lesson 14.2 Friends

Give an example of God’s help for Paul.

How would you help Paul? Would you send him a booklet on “How to climb out of the hole you are in”? Or would you write him a carefully reasoned explanation of the theology behind why you should always know sunshine and never darkness? The answer is in 2 Corinthians 7:6: “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” *The Message Bible’s* version is this: “Then the God who lifts up the downcast, lifted our heads and our hearts with the

arrival of Titus.” The comfort that God sent in this instance to the depressed Paul came in the form of a person—Titus.

God comforts and lifts up the downcast. He lifts our heads and our hearts with the arrival of a *Titus*. That is the healing power of friendship. We are low; we are down, and often it is God’s will to comfort us through His people.

What do you think Titus said when he came to Paul? “Old buddy, how are you? You are not so good. You say you are depressed. Come on, Paul, you are the primary apostle. You are my leader. You cannot be depressed. Here, let me read a little something to you: “All things work together for good—Oh, you did know that—you wrote it!” We know that is not what he did. I imagine that Titus came in, put his arms around Paul, and greeted him with a holy kiss and hug because that was the way Hebrews greeted each other.

What can you do when you encounter a fellow minister who is battling with depression or anxiety?

I have some good friends who lost their five-year-old son some years ago. Such loss is devastating regardless of how close one is to the Lord. So, understandably, the parents were mourning. A couple of their friends heard about the death, hopped on a plane, and went to the mourners’ house unannounced. They entered without saying a word, put their arms around the couple, and wept with them. Those of us who are pastors know that is often just what is needed—this wonderful touch that happens at the coming of a friend like Titus—love and care.

So Titus entered into Paul’s sorrow. And what was Paul’s response? He did not say, “Titus, I have it all together, buddy. I did not really mean that I was depressed. Look, you are the disciple and I am the leader. I am fine.” No. He was honest with Titus. Titus then affirmed Paul: “Paul, you mean a lot to us. I would not be a Christian if I had never met you.”

Look at the broad affirmations in verses 6–7: “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.” How beautiful that is! Read the same passage in *The Message Bible*.

Affirmation

Explain the meaning of affirmation.

We need to have affirmation in the body of Christ. Years ago I read that Philips Brooks kept a file of nice letters he had received. He saved them for rainy days. So years ago I decided to keep a file like that too. Sometimes I pull it out to encourage myself.

What is affirmation?

The ministry of affirmation—building one another up—is critical in your ministry and your coworkers’ ministry. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:12: “So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.” In *The Message Bible*, we read this: “My primary concern was not for the one who did the wrong or even the one wronged, but for you ... that you would realize and act upon the deep, deep ties between us before God. That’s what happened ... and we felt just great.”

I deeply believe that we are united in the core of our beings by the fact that the Holy Spirit has caused our spirits to be born again. Sometimes Satan drives a wedge between us, but we must know the reality that we do love each other. God gave us friendships to protect us from discouragement. God’s will is for the body of Christ to care for each other because of fellowship’s unique healing powers. Here are Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 7:13–16.

By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit had been refreshed by all of you. I had boasted to him about you. You have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

And, again, here is the same passage as found in *The Message Bible*:

And then, when we saw how Titus felt—his exuberance over your response—our joy doubled. It was wonderful to see how revived and refreshed he was by everything you did. If I went out on a limb in telling Titus how great I thought you were, you didn’t cut off that limb. As it turned out, I hadn’t exaggerated one bit. Titus saw for himself that everything I had said about you was true. He can’t quit talking about it, going over again and again the story of your prompt obedience and the dignity and sensitivity of your hospitality. He was quite overwhelmed by it all, and I couldn’t be more pleased—I’m so confident and proud of you.

Note the mutual benefits—Paul was comforted, Titus is encouraged, the believers around Paul are built up. Such is the healing power of friendship.

Some of you are depressed not because of sin, but because you love Jesus so much, and have gone for it all. Your heart has been enlarged, and you are seeking those things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. You are worn out and despairing. It is God’s plan that you be touched by a Titus.

Here are three practical suggestions for handling those times:

1. Cultivate friendships. When you are young, it is easy to look at friendships in a utilitarian, temporary way. You are moving on from one thing to another. But I have come to see that the things that are most important in my life are my committed relationships with Jesus, my family, and my friends. Value your friendships.
2. Be willing to be a friend. Be a Titus. Are there people you need to reach out to?

3. Be willing to be befriended, to have a Titus come and touch your life. Many of us have difficulty in receiving the touch of a Titus.

Have you gone for it all because you love Jesus? Have you experienced some of these things? Then be open to the touch of God. Be the hand of God, and value friendships in Jesus.

Going the Distance

Distance runners reach a point where their legs and lungs give out. For most of them this signals quitting time. They call it *hitting the wall*, and it captures their feeling that it is no use to go on. What began as a race of high hopes now closes around their utter fatigue and collapsed dream of finishing the race. Most runners quit in this case, but not all! Some plow on through the stages of wheezing and anguish.

This reminds me of how our Christian walk unfolds. We hit the wall from time-to-time and come to the point of giving up because of the pain and consequences of keeping on. One of the purposes of God's grace is to help us get past the wall, so we can keep running the race. We are no good to any relationship unless our running is covered with grace. This is where daily prayer is so vital. You talk to the Father, and He talks to you. You uplink and He down downlinks. This is at the core of any healing of spiritual exhaustion. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).¹⁵

¹⁵ T. Ray Rachels, [*Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 162–170.

Chapter 15 It Is the Finishers Who Count

I was looking through an old file of illustrations preparing for a message when I found a San Jose newspaper clipping from 1972. The writer of the article noted that a plain bar of iron was worth \$5. The same bar of iron made into horseshoes was worth \$10.50. If made into needles, it was worth \$4,285. If turned into balance wheels for watches, the iron was worth \$250,000.

This is true of another kind of material—you. In most of life, your value is determined by what you make of yourself. I see my work as a minister of the gospel as being entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit. My value is determined not so much by what I make of myself, but rather by what I allow the Holy Spirit to make of me.

The following statement came out of the Reformation, but it still offers an accurate description of the minister's mission: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith; unto salvation." (The statement is part of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a document written to educate lay persons in matters of doctrine and belief.)

Lesson 15.1 The Foundation

Objective

15.1.1 Discuss the purposes of preaching.

Lesson 15.2 Perseverance

Objectives

15.2.1 Explain the importance of perseverance to the minister.

15.2.2 Discuss the value of pressure in our lives and ministry.

15.2.3 Identify four pressures that are part of ministry.

15.2.4 Discuss the relevance of Hebrews 11.

Lesson 15.3 Final Words

Objective

15.3.1 Identify five principles you will apply now.

Lesson 15.1 The Foundation

Discuss the purposes of preaching.

Our dependence on the Spirit of God to bring divine energy into our work rests on these four major foundations:

What are the four major foundations of preaching described by the author?

1. In biblical preaching comes God's Word—the product of the Holy Spirit—as a sword to pierce the conscience, a hammer to break up our idolatrous self-sufficiency, and a fire to melt our stone-hard hearts. We must always preach the Bible in all its breadth and nakedness, not just a few odd texts for fancy thoughts.
2. It is the Holy Spirit who gets the results. He alone can drive the Word deep into the conscience, can sway the will, can disarm the intellect, and can move the affections. A preacher's habitual dependence on the Spirit of God saves him or her from fretting during lean times and boasting during harvest. It is a matter of divine honor that the Word, when preached, will not be null and void.
3. God's Word is the basis for powerful preaching. Preachers are never more powerfully themselves than when they recognize their utter dependence upon the power of the Word and the Spirit. Satan strains at getting preachers worked up over results, or reactions, or lack of them. It is the spiritual traitor within our souls who whispers to us after the morning service, "That message bombed; it was a failure." It is the same traitor-voice that soothes us after the evening service with, "You really drove it home tonight, Preacher." We can never work the miracle of a changed life or even forge one link in the chain of a soul's connection with Christ.
4. When we comply with the divine conditions, we always see results. The results are meant to honor God and not to inflate individuals. I remember so well the remarks of Pentecostal Holiness Bishop Leon O. Stewart, who brought greetings at one of our General Councils a few years ago. He said,

May I plead with you tonight in your General Council? Would you do something for the rest of us? Primarily, would you do it for our Friend and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? Would you lead us out of modern cheap grace and easy believism? Would you lead us out of material greed and self-gratification, and would you lead us out of pseudo-psychology and exaggerated sensationalism? Would you lead us back to the voice that stills the voice of secular humanism and would you lead us back to the touch of the nail-printed hands that produce real and genuine miracles? And would you lead us back to Him, our true example, and the holy lifestyle that leads upward and ever upward to where the light lingers even when the sun is set? Would you please lead us back to a genuine appreciation of the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? Would you do that? Please do it! God bless you.

Lesson 15.2 Perseverance

Explain the importance of perseverance to the minister.

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we had better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we are in. Study how He did it. Because He never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish line and with God—He could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, or whatever. And now he is there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. (Hebrews 12:1–2, *The Message Bible*)

What is perseverance in ministry?

Most people who have what it takes to succeed maintain that the most important factor is not talent, wealth, or brilliance; rather it is perseverance. Consider the simple process of boiling water. If you put it on the stove but are impatient and take it off when you think you have waited long enough, you may simply have warm water. That is fine if you just want to wash your face. But if you are a bit more persistent and wait until the water starts to bubble, you will have hot water that can be used to make soup. Then you persevere a bit longer than seems bearable, until the water reaches 212 degrees. There, you have steam! With steam you can move a locomotive. In fact, with steam you can move just about anything. If your life is producing lukewarm results, persevere. Eventually you will reach your boiling point and experience God's power!

I completed Bible school with an understanding of the *Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints*. I expected the saints to practically line up to their position in that doctrine. I planned to study hard and expected my people to go out, plow through life, and persevere with the principles I would give them. But very quickly, it became clear that the saints do not persevere all that well. The more I realized that, the more discouraged I became. I quickly retreated to my study and prepared my pastoral exhortations. I stood in the pulpit and preached about perseverance. But a few months into the ministry my exhortations were turned back toward myself, because I was so often discouraged and disappointed.

Ministers need the community of ministers for mutual prayer and affirmation. It can be a comfort to talk with others about the trials of persevering in difficult pastorates. We each need someone to talk to within safe, accountable relationships. We must not allow ourselves to become isolated from those who can relate to the challenges we are facing.

Patience

I am not surprised that Hebrews 12 speaks about perseverance in this race of the ministry. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (12:1).

We must also run this ministry marathon with patience. Patience is a very descriptive word that combines two Greek words:

- *Hupo*, meaning “under”
- *Meno*, meaning “to remain”
- *Hupomeno* is a vivid picture of patience. It is literally “the ability to remain under with a good spirit.”

I heard an old Western story about how cattle fared in winter storms. Sometimes the storms took a heavy toll—with freezing rains and temperatures plummeting below zero. Then, bitterly cold winters would pile up huge snow drifts. Most cattle turned their backs to the icy blasts and moved downwind until they came up against the inevitable barbed wire fence. In the big storms, they would pile up against the fence and die by the score. But one breed always survived. Herefords would instinctively head into the wind. They would stand shoulder-to-shoulder, heads down, facing the blasts. One cowboy explained, “You most always found the Herefords alive and well.”

Pressure

Discuss the value of pressure in our lives and ministry.

When the pressure of ministry bears down on us, *Hupomeno* means we learn to stay under the pressure. We begin to cultivate in our spirits the ability to cope with issues, events, and people that come as part of ministerial territory.

When is pressure a good thing?

God’s servants grow by pressure and by crisis (James 1:2–4). God knows when to bring pressure so that it will challenge afresh and draw His servants closer to Him. The most beautiful diamond is merely a piece of black coal that has been under pressure for a long time. To avoid or reject pressure in our ministry is to miss what God will produce in us. That is exactly what Romans 5 says when it uses the word *hupomeno*.

There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. (Romans 5:3–4, *The Message Bible*)

If you accept the challenge of the pastorate, you have accepted the challenge of pressure. Ministry pressures will come from all sides.

On my first Sunday as senior pastor at Long Beach Christian Life Church, a couple met me in the lobby with the question: "Now, pastor, what are your goals for this church? Do you have a plan? We want to know up front where you plan to take this church." I said, after studying carefully, that my first plan was "to hold steady for a while. Let us try prayer as a starter. Then God will give us all a good direction for the church."

Lou Holtz, former Notre Dame football coach, had a standard answer when asked about job security: "I have a lifetime contract," he says. "That means I can't be fired during the third quarter if we're ahead and moving the ball" (Holtz as quoted in Keri 2004).

Identify four pressures that are part of ministry.

What four pressures do we encounter in ministry?

Priorities

It often happens on Saturday afternoon. I stand up from my desk, looking at the clock. My son's basketball game is set to start soon. I look down at my uncompleted sermon. As I walk toward the door, I remember what one deacon said a few months ago, "Pastor, you have got to study more. Feed us. Be in the Word. Stop running and stay in your chair." But I am also thinking about my son, warming up on the basketball court and looking at the door the whole game to see if I walk through.

I look back at my desk and see all the correspondence, the agendas that must be planned, and so forth. I think about shut-ins that I have not called on yet. All they want to hear from their pastor is "How are you doing today? Just wanted you to know I have been praying for you." Sometimes the pressure of priorities strains my soul.

Expectations

Sometimes going to a new pastorate is a little like Sam Levenson's story: "My folks were immigrants and fell under the dream, thinking that the streets of America were paved with gold. When Pop got here, though, he found out three things: (1) the streets were not paved with gold; (2) the streets were not even paved; and (3) he was supposed to do the paving."

It is an impossible task to please all the people all the time. I heard Teddy Kollek, former mayor of Jerusalem, tell this story. One morning at three o'clock his phone rang, and a very angry lady had just arrived home having driven her car over a huge pot hole in a main street, breaking the main spring in her car. She loudly complained that she was a taxpayer and should not have to put up with that. The mayor assured the lady he would look into her problem. Next morning he dispatched a work crew to repair the pot hole. The next morning at three o'clock, *her* phone rang. She sleepily answered and he said, "Ma'am, I just wanted you to know that the pothole is fixed."

I remember a deacon who used to time all pastoral prayers and bring his report to the next board meeting. And people have come to my office to say, "Pastor, you have to be harder on sin. You have to come down hard, be clear, and speak to the issues." The same week somebody else calls and says, "Pastor, be careful; do not get too legalistic!" Tough pressure will come from all sides, and it will produce perseverance.

Pettiness

The following paragraphs contain real-life examples of the types of pettiness that ministers will encounter:

One of our pastors got a letter in the mail, unsigned, from a person who told him that what he needed most in his ministry was a good psychologist who could talk to him about his severe mental disorder. The letter included a psychologist's phone number.

A man and his wife who attended a church in southern California left the church because the pastor would not acquiesce to his demands to remove all scent-laden objects in the church. He said both he and his wife had severe allergies to smells. The man began attending a new church and was later elected to the church board; this time he bullied his way to making his rules stick. So many people left that the district had to close the church! The church was later reopened and the new pastor told me the same man came back. "I saw him, hurried back to my office, and splashed on as much after shave as I could stand!"

Another pastor apologized to me for the time I was with them for a banquet. "We lost a family that night. We had failed to set a dinner place for them, and they were offended by our oversight. Our explanation about the huge crowd that night was not sufficient to soothe their anger against me for not having planned well enough to adjust for the overflow. So they left the church in anger."

Recently, a colleague, who was experiencing pressure, said, "If I ever leave the ministry, it will be because people are so petty. Last week, all week long, I ministered to a family whose child was dying in the hospital. Every day I was there by the bedside, weeping because of the heartbreak. I arrived home late. I was there five minutes and the phone rang; a man from our church said, "Pastor, I just want you to know we probably will not be back. My wife and I are deeply offended. You left our son's name out of the list of young people mentioned in the bulletin last Sunday."

I once arrived at a church to preach as a guest of the pastor and was met at the door by a man who greeted me with these words: "I will leave at noon, whether or not you will be finished preaching. I tell my pastor that, so now I am telling you."

Some families change from church-to-church, looking for something that is just the way they like it. Then, once you think you have changed it to meet their expectations, they have moved to

another church, still not satisfied. How do you cope with that? We have to persevere and not take such experiences personally.

Fatigue

One of our fine pastors went through church difficulties and was vindicated. He remained for a while despite a lingering depression. He called me and said, “Ray, I have really had it. I just do not have it in me to go another month. Can I take a year off?” I asked, “Well, what do you want to do?”

“Do not call me for fill-ins, or anything that would put me in front of people. I have always wanted to drive a truck. Next week a three-week driver’s school session begins in Kingman, Arizona. I want to attend. He went, graduated, and got a long-distance driving job. He took the year off, called me frequently during the year, and ended by saying, “I feel whole again. All I needed was some time off. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” I could understand his experience.

God made me a people-person. It is a good quality for the pastorate. But sometimes people-persons get *peopled out*. There are times when I get home at night and ask Judy not to talk to me for three hours. I just need to rest.

I have been awakened in the middle of the night by the ringing telephone. The first problem is to find the phone in the darkness. The next challenge is to sound like the pastor when I pick up the phone. But the ultimate problem is way down inside. In my heart, I am thinking, “Wait a minute. I have been ministering to people all day long. Please, Lord, can I at least have a good night’s sleep?” How, then, do I respond to that caller?

Consider this young Frenchman pushing his son’s carriage down the street while the baby cried. “Please, Bernard, control yourself,” the father said quietly. “Easy there, Bernard, keep calm!”

“Congratulations, Monsieur,” said a woman who had been watching. “You know just how to speak to infants—calmly and gently.” Then she asked, “So the little fellow’s name is Bernard?”

“No, Madame,” corrected the father. “His name is Andre. I am Bernard.”

Often I want to say to my 2 a.m. caller, “Read Psalm 37 twice and call me later!” But instead, I say to myself, “Patience, Ray.” The people in our churches cry, push, annoy, act selfishly, ask too much, do not understand, and try often to intimidate. Pastor, stay calm. You are the shepherd.

Discuss the relevance of Hebrews 11.

For what are the heroes of Hebrews 11 seemingly most lauded?

If you are going to be in this marathon called the ministry, you have to persevere. You must acquire the ability to remain under the pressure with a good spirit. How can you do it? Hebrews

12:1 begins with “Therefore,” a concluding exhortation that grows out of the context. It takes us back into the preceding context and a formidable list of people who persevered under tremendous pressures. Look through Hebrews 11. There are forty verses, but let us review some of the trials as described in *The Message Bible*:

Through acts of faith, they toppled kingdoms, made justice work, took the promises for themselves. They were protected from lions, fires, and sword thrusts, turned disadvantage to advantage, won battles, routed alien armies. Women received their loved ones back from the dead. There were those who, under torture, refused to give in and go free, preferring something better: resurrection. Others braved abuse and whips, and, yes, chains and dungeons. We have stories of those who were stoned, sawed in two, murdered in cold blood; stories of vagrants wandering the earth in animal skins, homeless, friendless, powerless—the world didn’t deserve them!—making their way as best they could on the cruel edges of the world. Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised. God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours. (Hebrews 11:33–40, *The Message Bible*)

They finished well. They had a good report. Would you trade anything in this world for the divine compliment? To look at Jesus’ face and have Him say to you, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” They finished well. “How did they do it?” The text is clear: “By faith.” That is the key to perseverance. Here is what we can say about faith:

- Faith is the strength of perseverance. Count how many times “by faith” is written in Hebrews 11. Faith is not a mystical idea. Faith is a solid reality. You can grab on to it and apply to your life.
- Faith is believing in reality.
- Faith is believing in the truth of God.
- Faith is believing in what God has said and has programmed. Then you can apply it to your life and live as though your desire is true right now even if the fulfillment is for the future.
- Faith has substance. There is no faith without plugging into something! The common denominator in all the Hebrews 11 examples is the reality that they knew God had a plan and purpose for their lives.

The ancients were willing to be a part of that plan and purpose—even if it meant pain, so that they might gain eternity. I ask myself if I have the faith to believe that I fit into God’s plan and purpose. Do I have the faith to believe that I am a part of His program and that He has called me for a particular purpose, time, and reason?

The text teaches us that while perseverance is our indispensable companion in ministry, it is faith in the Father, who has a plan and purpose for us, that is the strength of perseverance. You cannot run without it!

Hebrews 12:1 paints a picture of a great Roman arena. The sporting arena was full of high suspense. It is as though the stadium is full of spectators, “a great cloud of witnesses.” That references all those who have gone before in Hebrews 11. Now, it is my turn. I am in the arena surrounded by God’s past servants who have held on through suffering, persecution, and God’s yet-to-be-fulfilled promises. The Holy Spirit hands the baton to me and says, “Ray Rachels, it is your turn.” With the baton in hand, I see the obstacle course in front of me, full of strained

priorities, impossible expectations, and all kinds of misunderstandings and confusion. I take that baton, but I give it back and say, “God, I cannot.”

As my mind replays that spiritual view, I remember that Peter, one of the witnesses, was crucified upside down. John the Baptist was beheaded, and I see Stephen’s face, stoned to death. I see those pastors in my own generation in Peru, dragged from their churches and hacked to death with machetes. What would they say to me or to you? “Run! Do not quit! Stay the course!”

In those Roman arenas, there was always an emperor’s box, and the athlete would look up to see if the emperor was there. When we look up, we see Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We see Him stand up, lift that nail-scarred hand, and we hear His words, “You can make it! I will be with you!”

So lead us through your preaching, pastor. Lead us through your example in godliness to your flock. Do not get discouraged, disillusioned, lazy, and selfish. Do not quit. One of Satan’s favorite tricks is to make us think we have good reason to drop out. The world is full of starters, but it is the finishers who count.

Lesson 15.3 Final Words

Identify five principles you will apply now.

I will close this course on a personal note. This is a course about relationships and ethics. By this time, you have learned a great deal about me. Since I was credentialed as a minister in 1962, I have seen ministers who finish well and ministers who do not finish well. In my role on a district leadership team, it might seem that I would be accustomed to the times when a minister falls. But each time my heart breaks for those who started out with a noble calling and ended up off-course.

Do you know what a baker’s dozen is? In medieval times, bakers were severely punished if they short-changed a customer. To guard against that, instead of giving twelve items, they gave thirteen for the price of twelve. I have a baker’s dozen for you. Here are thirteen things I wish I had learned sooner:

From among the baker’s dozen, choose one that seems especially meaningful to you, and write a brief paragraph explaining why.

1. God’s call to me is to himself.
2. A bad temper always leads to trouble.
3. Few things are better than a good friend.

4. You cannot please everybody, even with the purest motives.
5. A faithful plodder may not have the flair of a hare, but he or she usually finishes better.
6. God does not love anybody else better than He loves you.
7. There is a difference between consecration and gifts.
8. Wisdom is a wonderful attribute.
9. Be known as a person who loves God's Word.
10. Put your individualism to work for the good of the team.
11. People are more important than programs.
12. Never forget that you work for Jesus.
13. You can always count on God.

My hope is that you will slip this list into your top drawer and pull it out from time-to-time. Sometimes we simply need to be reminded about things we already know. Stay the course.

An effective, contemporary ministry must point people to the power of the unchanging Christ. Our ministry must be highly conscious of contemporary culture, its patterns, styles, and language. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:7–8). Here is the same passage from *The Message Bible*: "Appreciate your pastoral leaders who gave you the Word of God. Take a good look at the way they live, and let their faithfulness instruct you, as well as their truthfulness. There should be a consistency that runs through us all. For Jesus doesn't change—yesterday, today, tomorrow, he's always totally himself."

Yet, connecting a Christ-centered message to a church-resistant culture demands from you and me deep personal spirituality. Good interpersonal skills are a vital bridge to connect to your community and demonstrate an authentic relationship with Christ. Courses like this one and mentors from your fellowship will help you develop better skills.

But as you seek to cultivate a compelling personal spirituality, you will have to dig deeply into God's Word. You will have to expose your soul to the Word's magnification and bend yourself toward its precepts. You will discover a love for your heavenly Father that is exceeded only by His love for you. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are" (1 John 3:1).

Here is the foundation of the whole counsel on being a minister. It is about the Father's love for us, for me, as an individual. It is the answer to the question, "Why do you do this?" It is the reason for getting up in the morning, to try again to make a difference as His servant.

I want to cover my own ministry and challenge you to cover yours, with one of John Wesley's prayers:

Go to Christ and tell him, Lord Jesus, if you will receive me into your house, if you will but own me as your servant, I will not stand upon any term; impose upon me what conditions you please, write down your own articles, command me what you will, put me to anything you see as good; let me come under your roof, let me be your servant and spare not to command me; I will be no longer my own, but give up myself to your will in all things.

Be content that Christ should both choose your work and choose your condition; that he should have command of you and the disposal of you.

Make me what you will, Lord, and set me where you will. Let me be a vessel of silver or gold, or a vessel of wood or stone, so I be a vessel of honor: of whatever form of metal, whether higher or lower, finer or coarser, I am content; if I be not the head or the eye, or the ear, one of the nobler and more honorable instruments you will ever play, let me be the hand, or the foot,

one of the most laborious, and lowest and most contemptible of all the servants of my Lord, let my dwelling be on the dunghill, my position in the wilderness, my name and lot among the hewers of wood, or drawers of water, among the doorkeepers of your house; anywhere where I may be serviceable; I put myself wholly into your hands; put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will: put me to doing: put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or trodden under foot for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing, I freely and heartily resign all to your pleasure and disposal.

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www.iprodigal.com
www.enough.org
www.covenanteyes.com
www.exxit.org
www.thesafesite.com

www.xxxchurch.com¹⁶

¹⁶ T. Ray Rachels, *Relationships and Ethics in Ministry: An Independent-Study Textbook*, Second Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010), 171–191.