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Men of Truth

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Executive Director

It was during our Christmas night phone call to my wife's parents that I learned Dr. John Walvoord had passed away. Then I learned the Memorial Service was to be in less than 42 hours. My heart and mind raced.

I knew I had to go to Dallas and represent all the members and churches of IFCA International, but there was precious little time to make all the arrangements. I was in Alabama on Christmas night and had to drive 700 miles home before I could even think of getting on an airplane. Then I knew holiday traffic on the airlines would be congested. I wasn't even certain I could get a flight on such short notice.

But the Lord graciously intervened, and I was at the service in Dallas two days after Christmas. It was a wonderful and fitting tribute to a man who had been a part of the fellowship of IFCA since the day of his salvation. (IFCA co-founder Billy McCarrell led a teen-aged John Walvoord to Christ at a Racine, Wisconsin Bible Study in 1928.)

In the hectic hours surrounding that trip to Dallas, I asked myself many times: "Why is this so important to me? Why have I worked so hard to get to this Memorial Service?" I came up with several answers. But I finally realized it was a very personal trip.

After I came to know Christ as my Savior in October, 1972 I devoted myself to a life of studying and proclaiming the Bible. And the men whose books meant the most to me in those days were Richard W. DeHaan and John F. Walvoord.

I missed the Memorial Service for Richard DeHaan (who was the son of IFCA co-founder M. R. DeHaan, and whose death on July 16 and funeral I learned of after returning from vacation). Because I missed that service in July, I was all the more determined not to miss Dr. Walvoord's Memorial Service. And I am profoundly grateful to have been there for all of us in IFCA International...but also for myself.

Through the years I've grown to appreciate the impact of the teaching ministry and writings of Richard DeHaan and John Walvoord in my own life. They were men of truth whose written words simply explained God's Word. They represent to me the kind of balanced Biblical teaching I want for my own ministry. Affirming the truth. Living the truth. Defining the truth. Proclaiming the truth. Defending the truth. Loving the truth. All in balance, all at the same time in my life and ministry. Balance. That's what DeHaan and Walvoord represented to me.

THE NEED FOR BALANCE

Five decades after the Lord Jesus' ascension, the Apostle John reflected on the life and ministry of Christ. John wrote these words: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth...For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:14, 17).

It was John's eyewitness testimony that the glorious Lord Jesus was perfect in every way. Perfect in love ("grace"). Perfect in truth. Perfectly in balance. Perfectly revealing the One true God.

How sinful and out of balance we are compared to Christ! It seems we always tilt out of balance, from one extreme to the other: all love, no truth; all truth, no love; mostly one, less of the other.

We, the defenders of truth can fall out of balance and succumb to spiritual pride, defending the truth because we know we're right. We truth-defenders can fall prey to an elitist mindset: narrow, sanctimonious, ever ready to transform mundane practicalities into precious issues of principle.

We, the lovers of grace can lose our balance and become so sensitive to others that we never seek to offend, always loving, never standing. Some have moved so far down this pathway that they've become like one mega-church pastor who said in an interview, "Pastors make people feel ignorant and guilty...by saying, 'You don't do this' or 'You're doing this, and this behavior is against everything that is in the Bible.' Preaching a sermon like 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' wouldn't work today. Today, I think the title of that sermon would be, 'I Went on Vacation and Felt Empty Inside.'" (transcript for this television report "Are Americans Avoiding Hell?" may be found at <http://www.cbn.org/CBNNews/CWN/112702hell.asp>)

OUR GOAL SHOULD BE BALANCE

It should always be the goal of every true believer to be like our Savior, balanced in love and truth. But what would that look like? What are some of the ways this balance should be seen? The last issue of Voice was dedicated to the theme of love. This issue is dedicated to the theme of truth. Both issues together have sought to answer the question of balancing truth and love and achieving a God-honoring balance between them both. It is my hope that the members of IFCA International can achieve such a balance in our lives and ministries.

I believe that John F. Walvoord and Richard W. DeHaan were balanced men of truth. They had a ministry of balanced Bible teaching, like the kind I want in my own ministry. Affirming the truth.

Living the truth. Defining the truth. Proclaiming the truth. Defending the truth. Loving the truth. All in balance, all at the same time. Balance.

The Balance Of Grace & Truth

Roy Sprague

Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:9-10). "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:16-17). "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17).

The inspiration of Scripture declares the balance of mercy and truth, of righteousness and peace, of separation and compassion, of grace and truth. This balance has been one of the distinctives of IFCA International.

THE HISTORY OF IFCA INTERNATIONAL

"In 1909 God moved two Christian laymen to set aside a large sum of money for issuing twelve volumes that would set forth the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and which were to be sent to ministers of the gospel, missionaries, Sunday school superintendents, and others engaged in aggressive Christian work throughout the English speaking world." [The Fundamentals, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1970, p.7]

"So effective were these popular defenses of core Christian doctrines that within a decade they had given a platform, a banner, and a name to the majority of North American conservative Christians: "fundamentalists." Those who contributed to these twelve books "were responding to the classic liberal and spiritual heresies that abounded before World War I. They could not foresee the neo-orthodox, existentialist, modernist, nihilist, liberation, feminist, situation ethic, and New Age theologies that would lash the twentieth-century church." [The Fundamentals For The Twenty-First Century, Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 2000, p.13]

"Of all the issues that have plagued the church throughout its history, none have been more devastating and caused more difficulty than that of apostasy. The course of church history in America for over a century has been one of fierce conflict over this issue. No large denomination has escaped its ravages. They have all been confronted with rationalism, social gospel, Neo-Orthodoxy, Neo-Evangelicalism and other ideas offering new ways to accommodate church doctrine to the changing times. Disruption, disorder and decay in theological concepts have been the order of the day. Out of this milieu arose the historic fundamentalist movement in which the Independent Fundamental Churches of America have played an important role." [James O. Henry, For Such A Time As This, Westchester, IFCA, 1983, p.6]

Thus, in 1930 the Independent Fundamental Churches of America was organized with 114 delegates from 12 states unanimously adopting both the Constitution and the Articles Of Faith. Such was the prevailing spirit of unity, as men of God rallied to the challenge of Dr. William McCarrell that "The time has come for the preaching of the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit." Our history is a declaration of the pursuit of grace and truth.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF IFCA INTERNATIONAL

My Father became a member of IFCA in 1930, and continued to be actively involved until his death in 1968. I can remember attending IFCA Conferences as a boy and listening to the brethren discuss various theological issues, express deep concern about the inroads of liberalism, and encourage one another to stand for the truth without compromise and with compassion. These men were committed to the Word, they had a passion for souls, but they were heart-sick because some men and churches were denying the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Since its inception, IFCA has had as its foundational principles --

"To declare the TRUTH of the Gospel" (Galatians 2:5, Colossians 1:5)

"To enjoy the FELLOWSHIP of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:3-5)

"To be set for the DEFENSE of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:7 and 1:17)

"To engage in the FURTHERANCE of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:12 and 2:16)

Our foundations are a testimony to the priorities of grace and truth.

THE EXAMPLE OF IFCA INTERNATIONAL

The new church had begun just one week earlier with 13 people in attendance at the first service. The approval by the School Board to rent the local Junior High School was certainly an answer to prayer. The fact that a young lady had professed faith in Christ during the week was most definitely an answer to prayer. Many of the people attending on the first Sunday had invited friends and neighbors to visit this new church, to be known as Family Bible Church. The excitement was keen in anticipation of the church's second Sunday when the director of the IFCA Church Extension mission was scheduled to preach. His message was taken from Acts 16 concerning the need to reach out with the Gospel to the hungry, the helpless, and the hardened. It seemed that people were responsive to the truth of the Word. There were over twenty in attendance.

But immediately following the message, six people cornered the preacher, with the challenge, "Why must the church preach doctrine? Why can't we all just get together and love one another?" Yes, I was that preacher!

I wondered what caused this confrontation. Then one of the individuals stated they had read the IFCA Articles of Faith, and did not agree with some of it. Whenever an IFCA Church Extension agency plants a new church, the Articles of Faith are used to inform people of the church's position.

In seeking to answer the questions raised by these people, I expressed our desire to be loving and gracious, but that a clear declaration of Biblical truth is the cornerstone on which Bible-believing churches are established. In response to this statement, one of the individuals commented, "Doctrine divides churches; we want to accept everybody, and just love Jesus and have unity." These folks did not come to the church again. But thank God many others did, and numbers of people have trusted Christ as Savior in the twenty-nine years since that Sunday. Today, Family Bible Church is a member of IFCA International with a growing, Christ-centered ministry, solidly based on the truth of Scripture. In reality, Biblical doctrine unites rather than divides. Our example is evidence of the practice of grace and truth.

THE COMMITMENTS OF IFCA INTERNATIONAL

"As the twenty-first century dawns, we again stand at a theological watershed. The critical objections of liberalism have been tempered by existential, experiential approaches to theology. These have now turned to a 'do-it-yourself' religion. Emotional subjectivism has replaced any

fixed point of reference in defining liberal Christianity by objective standards of biblical truth. Whereas the classical liberals of the early 1900s were sure they alone were right, the new liberals believe that each individual can create a theology that is "personally right. The challenge to genuine Christianity has come full circle. Again we must reaffirm, define, and defend the 'fundamentals' of faith to a new generation. Only now we face a generation that asks if there is anything 'real' in a world of broken promises, video image, political spin, and media manipulation. The watching world still looks for the real thing. They will find it only by turning to the unchanging reality of Jesus Christ as Lord." [The Fundamentals For The Twenty-First Century, Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 2000, p.26]

As we begin the 21st century, the commitments of IFCA International are carefully articulated in the Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Goals Statement. These documents declare our purpose, our position, and our direction. Indeed, our commitments are a declaration of our propagation of grace and truth.

THE PRACTICE OF IFCA INTERNATIONAL

In 1983, as Dr. John Walvoord (long IFCA member now with the Lord) was traveling with us to Anniversary Banquets, he stated, "So often men will see one truth of Scripture and will emphasize that as if it were the only truth; or they will come to a conclusion about some teaching, and will seek to force Scripture to say more than it says. We need to let the Word speak and maintain a biblical balance."

One of the key verses of IFCA International is Philippians 1:17 which states, "I am set for the defense of the Gospel." The Greek word translated defense is *apologia* which means "a verbal defense or declaration." This same word is also translated in Scripture as "to declare, to answer, to reveal, and to contend."

There are four words which help produce the balance of grace and truth --unity, union, unanimity, and uniformity. A clear understanding of these will enable one to know when "to be gracious," when "to contend," when "to answer," and when "to declare."

UNITY is the condition of being one. In Jesus Christ, every member of His body are those with whom we have unity. Even those people who disagree or get drawn into error are not our enemies, if indeed, they are born again and are "in Christ." We have unity with them -- but little more than that is possible.

UNION is the condition of being associated and united in a relationship for a common cause. This describes that joy and privilege which is ours through IFCA International. We have declared agreement with the Articles Of Faith, Constitution and Purpose of the fellowship. In this arena we have both unity and union, and we join hands and hearts to labor together for the glory of God. At this level we enjoy many benefits and have effective cooperation.

UNANIMITY is the condition of being in complete mutual agreement. Certainly all members and member churches have made a commitment to the IFCA Articles of Faith. And while we have unity and union with all, we do not have unanimity. It surprises some to realize that all members of IFCA International are not in complete agreement. Yes, there is unanimity concerning the fundamentals of the Word, but there is a measure of diversity on certain issues as well. Thus, it is not required by IFCA International to have complete unanimity in order to enjoy the fellowship, cooperation and benefits of IFCA.

UNIFORMITY is the condition of having the same form, style or structure. Since its inception, IFCA International has honored the autonomy of the local church, encouraging the privileges of self-government. While each member and church has strong beliefs and equally strong

preferences, yet there is granted a diversity to each one concerning the form, style and structure which is practiced. Thus again, it is not required by IFCA International to have complete uniformity in order to enjoy the fellowship, cooperation and benefits of IFCA.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11).

By the enabling power of our Lord may our life and ministry be a dynamic, Christ-like performance of the balance of grace and truth.

Roy Sprague was elected President of IFCA International at the 2002 Convention and will serve until 2005. He and wife Elvia live in Tacoma, WA.

The Church at the Crossroad of Truth

Gary Gilley

One of the unique privileges and responsibilities afforded the pastor is that of constant trafficking in truth. There is a very real danger, however, that a pastor might squander away this great honor due to various pressures that tend to rob him of this focus.

Of the many thieves that attempt to steal away a pastor's passion for truth, none is more powerful than the prevailing philosophy of our age. Just three months after the 9/11 terrorist attack USA Today reported that Americans' confidence in absolute truth had fallen from 38 percent to an all time low of 22 percent--and this in the wake of a short-term burst of church attendance following the tragedy. Truth is out; relativism is in. One bumper sticker that offers a lot of insight concerning modern thought reads, "There is no right or wrong--only fun or boring." The pastor is increasingly facing a world, and often a Christian community, that would rather feel good than be good, that would rather be entertained than edified, and is often offended by "Thus saith the Lord."

What's a pastor to do? He has a choice to make. He can tell people what they want to hear and perhaps gain their favor, or he can tell them what God says they need to hear and risk their displeasure. The subtle danger is to try to do both, with predicable results. Os Guinness reminds us, "Either we conform the truth to our desires or we conform our desires to the truth." The pastor must boldly proclaim the precious truth of God's Word. When he does so, he edifies the people of God and glorifies the Lord of lords.

In the early days of the twentieth century the American church was embroiled in a great controversy that would ultimately result in a schism that exists to this day. The growing liberal wing of Christianity, having fallen in love with German higher criticism of the previous century, was challenging all that believers had held dear since the Reformation. Under attack, among other things, was the deity of Christ, the miracles, the inspiration of Scripture and the very gospel itself. Rising to the challenge were men who called themselves Fundamentalist, because they adhered to the fundamentals of the faith that they believed defined what true Christianity is. One of those early Fundamentalists was Princeton professor and Reformed theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield. Warfield warned his generation of the consequences of compromising on doctrine in order to accommodate and draw the unbeliever.

The moment a church takes up such a position, however, it would cease to be a Christian Church: the core of Christianity is its provision for salvation from sin. No doubt by the adoption of such a

platform many would be recovered to the Church who now stand aloof from it. But this would be not because the world had been brought into the Church, but because the Church had been merged into the world. The offense of Christianity has always been the cross; as of old, so still today, Christ crucified is to Jews a stumbling-block and to Greeks foolishness. It would be easy to remove the offense by abolishing the cross. But that would be to abolish Christianity.

The battle cry of the liberal church of Warfield's day was relevancy, just as today. The only way Christians, many believed, were going to impress and impact the world of their day was to incorporate secular philosophies and fads into the life of the church. The world had to see that the church was "cool"; it was up-to-date; it was in keeping with the times. Again Warfield offered wise words,

A theology which is to be kept in harmony with a growing science and philosophy and scholarship, breaking their way onward by a process of trial and correction, must be a veritable nose of wax which can be twisted in any direction as it may serve our temporary purpose. If it be asked, therefore, in what way "the fundamental theology of the Church is to be related to the literary, scientific, and philosophical certainties of our time," the answer certainly cannot be that it is to be subordinated to them and made their slave, tremblingly following their every variation as they zigzag their devious way onward toward the certainties, not "of our time," but of all time.

Warfield, and other like-minded defenders of the faith, were ignored by the major denominations resulting in the secularization of the church rather than the evangelizing of the world. Many who recognized that these denominational churches had sold out, left, as we mentioned earlier, to form their own evangelical and Fundamental denominations, fellowships, schools and parachurch organizations. It is the descendents of these modern day reformers who are caving in to the same kind of forces that their fathers fought so bravely against.

History tells us that it would not be many years after the liberals of the early 1900s "won" their war against the Fundamentalists, that their churches went into a decline from which they have not yet recovered. It did not take people long to realize that if the church was not offering anything significantly different from what the world offered, then apparently the church was unnecessary. The liberal church marginalized itself through compromise with modernism. It ceased to be a light and became a reflection of the secular philosophies of the times.

The new paradigm church of today is following the same pattern. Flushed with success she is rushing headlong down the slope of secularism. It will only be a matter of time before it is realized that this modern church having lost its message, having compromised the faith, having mistaken numerical success for the blessing of God, will implode, for there will be nothing left to sustain it. The fallout will undoubtedly harm many but hopefully God will raise up a stronger church. A church serious about truth. Church that is more concerned about feeding the sheep than entertaining the goats. A church that knows the difference between worship and amusement. A church willing to be despised by the world for the sake of the Cross. A church not ashamed of the true Gospel, for it will know that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Portions of the above are from the book This Little Church Went to Market (2002, Xulon Press), by Pastor Gary E Gilley, Southern View Chapel, Springfield, IL. Gary is Regional President of the Central IL Regional.

What Would You Die For?

Steve Johnson

He sat across my desk as my Associate Pastor and I met with him to confront a doctrinal position he had been introducing within our church. His view regarding when the Rapture would take place differed from our Pretribulational position. The problem was not so much that he held a differing view as it was his attempts to spread his view to others, which we interpreted as a subtle way of seeking to win converts to his position from within our congregation. I had warned him about that very thing once before. The problem came to a head the previous Sunday in the Adult Bible Fellowship he attended, when he apparently felt it was time for a debate on the issue in the class. The result was an unpleasant confrontation with the teacher, who had been trying to avoid just such a "show-down" for several weeks.

His doctrine on the Rapture didn't agree with ours, and I felt it was time to eliminate the potential for disunity within our congregation. In my opinion it was not an issue that needed to become divisive. But if he was so convinced that he was right and we were wrong, then the ethical thing for him to do would be to find a church that taught his view, not undermine our teaching and try to change us.

The thought-provoking part of our conversation came near the end of the meeting. After we had discussed his deep-seated passion for his position I said to him, "Carl (not his real name), there are so many differing ideas among Christians when it comes to eschatology, even among evangelicals. I am personally committed to the Pretribulational position. It is what I firmly believe based upon a dispensational hermeneutic, it is the position held by this church, and it is what I will continue to teach, but quite frankly I wouldn't 'go to the stake' over my position." His instant reply was, "I would. I would die for my view [on the Rapture]." He was so certain that his position was the truth that he was willing to die a martyr's death over it.

I understand that not all of my IFCA colleagues will agree with my statement. Perhaps some of my brethren would be willing to lay down their life for their Pretribulational position. I respect that. But, right or wrong, Carl's reply caused me to think. Although his answer didn't surprise me, considering the fiery passion with which he defended his eschatology, it did cause me to seriously contemplate what doctrines I would or should be willing to die for. What points of our doctrine should we be willing to lay down our lives over rather than compromise or recant? Or to put it another way, what points of our doctrine do we consider essential enough to be worth being burned at the stake or beheaded over? It may help us to look at the martyrs of the past, those who have suffered persecution or death for their faith. What were they willing to die for?

Consider Daniel. The issue that got him thrown to the lions was prayer. He refused to honor an edict to cease his regular prayer meetings with God. The matter really boiled down to who he was going to worship, King Darius or Jehovah. To him the threat of death was a better option than compromise.

In a similar manner, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced death in the fiery furnace for their refusal to bow to a Babylonian deity. Death was better than selling out their faith in Jehovah in exchange for their lives.

Think of the ancient prophets and how many of them died over the message God gave them to proclaim. They called people to repentance from sin and to obedience to the one true God. Many of them paid for the message with their lives. Death was better than staying silent.

Moses was a man who was willing to die for the rebellious people of Israel after God threatened to destroy them over their worship of the golden calf. In his plea to God on their behalf Moses reveals his pastor's heart. To him death was a willing choice if it meant God would spare the Israelite people and give them another chance. But more significantly, Moses was concerned about the reputation of God among the Egyptians (Exodus 32:12). He would rather die himself than to see the name of God maligned.

The apostles died for the Gospel of salvation and the doctrines of Jesus Christ. All but John died a violent death. Missionaries through the generations have met similar fates, but they went to their mission fields with the willingness to endure hardship and the knowledge that their assignments may cost them their lives. The risk of death was better than living outside the will of God and seeing people die without knowing Christ.

Hebrews 11: 36-39 describes the unnamed saints who experienced mockings and scourgings, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in two, tempted, put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. All these gained approval for their faith, that is, the rock solid belief in the promises of God concerning them.

Finally, Jude 3 exhorts the saints to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to them. What is "the faith" for which they were to contend? It is the body of truth concerning God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the firm belief that there is salvation in no one else but He who was crucified, buried, and risen again for our justification. "Contend" means to fight; to struggle; to stand strong and not back down. I would assume that something that is worth fighting earnestly for is also worth dying for. Jude did not say earnestly contend for your opinions or ideas. The call is to contend for "the faith," the body of truth concerning Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. The martyred saints in Hebrews 11 were people who earnestly contended for the faith. They knew what was essential; what was worth dying for. And believers are being persecuted and killed today because they refuse to deny their faith in Jesus Christ.

As we assess the dogmas that we consider important enough to be martyred over, we should be sure that they are non-negotiable, non-debatable doctrines, even though we are thoroughly and biblically convinced of our position. We do not necessarily have to compromise our beliefs, but we should seriously consider how essential our views are and how far we would go in defending them. Is it worth being killed over one's view concerning the mode of baptism, what spiritual gifts are active today, precisely when the Rapture will take place, or who the two witnesses are in Revelation 11? You decide for yourself what you would die for.

The non-negotiable truths, however, in which every true born again Christian ought to stand firm are that Jehovah is the only one true God, Creator of the universe and sovereign over all; that the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, inerrant revelation of Himself to man; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became incarnate, born of a virgin, fully human and yet fully God; that He bore our sins in His crucified body on the cross and then rose triumphantly from the dead; and that through the redemption provided through His shed blood, He is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, no one comes to the Father but through personal faith in Him. This is the body of truth for which we should all be willing to earnestly contend, even to the point of persecution and death.

Steve Johnson is the Senior Pastor of Oakwood Bible Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is a graduate of Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music. He holds a B.A. degree from Cornerstone University and a M.A. degree from Moody Bible Institute.

Editor's Note: All of us in IFCA International agree that a regular diet of expository preaching is the best way to teach God's Word to God's people. But, on rare and special occasions there may be times when the expositor chooses to use some of the ways the O.T. prophets used to emphasize the truths of God's Word. One IFCA expositor explores this possibility.

Does Doctrine Have To Be Dull?

Joe O'Neill

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judge Michael Eakin has raised a lot of eyebrows these past few months because of his unique way of expressing his judicial opinion. He sometimes writes his rulings down in poems.

Recently, a woman brought a lawsuit against her husband. Before they were married, the man told her that her engagement ring was worth \$21,000. After they were married, the woman had the ring appraised and found it was a cubic zirconium instead of a diamond. Since her husband had lied about the worth of the engagement ring, the wife wanted the court to void the couple's prenuptial agreement. After reviewing the case, Judge Eakin wrote this opinion on the matter:

A groom must expect matrimonial pandemonium,
When his spouse finds he's given her a cubic zirconium,
Instead of a diamond in her engagement band,
The one he said was worth twenty-one grand.

Judge Eakin has been under a lot of criticism from fellow judges on account of his clever prose, yet he defends his actions and says, "You have an obligation as a judge to be right, but you have no obligation to be dull."¹

What Judge Eakin says is applicable to Christian teachers handling Bible doctrine. First of all, preachers and teachers have an obligation to be right. We are to "Be diligent to present [our]self approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We are told to "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and to instruct the brethren in "words of faith and good doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6). The Christian teacher needs to be accurate and right as a spokesperson for God.

Secondly, however, Bible teachers are under no obligation to be dull. In fact, we have every reason to be anything but boring! The example of the prophets helps us to see that God had many ways for His servants to convey His Word. Let's look at how these great teachers of the past made doctrinal truth interesting to their audience.

The Prophets Sometimes Told Stories

When the prophet Nathan confronted David concerning his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite, Nathan told an interesting story (2 Samuel 12). He didn't immediately confront David with the truth of Divine justice and punishment, but instead engaged the king's mind and emotions by talking about a greedy rich guy who unmercifully takes a poor man's only lamb. The story caught David's attention, because lambs, poor men and rich men were issues that were dear to his heart as a shepherd and a king. David was listening so intently to Nathan's story, that his anger was greatly aroused and he pronounced strong judgment against the man.

By making the doctrine of justice interesting and practical in the form of a story, David was able to come to some clear and objective conclusions about injustice. So when Nathan says, "You are the man!" David is able to see how wicked his actions were and how deserving of the judgment of God he was. The story, along with Nathan's explanation, made the doctrine of Divine justice come alive. Nathan took David from the known to the unknown by use of a simple story.

In the same way, Christian doctrine can be better understood with the help of illustrative stories. It can be very effective. Though we may not be as gifted in telling stories as some other preachers, certainly we should do our best to find an illustration that will help bring the doctrine of God's Word to the heart of the listener. We can even use stories that people already know.

For example, "The Three Little Pigs" can be used to illustrate certain Christian doctrine: the deceitful wolf is illustrative of Satan (John 10:10); the houses that don't last because they are built out of the straw and wood are illustrative of the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15); the house of the wise pig that is solid and withstands the onslaughts of the wolf is illustrative of the necessity to build our lives on the Word of Christ (Matthew 7:24-27). You can probably think of many other ways to use other well-known or personal stories to convey sound Biblical doctrine and put them to sanctified use.

The Prophets Sometimes Used Drama

Another way the prophets used to bring out doctrinal truths was drama. Isaiah 20:2 tells us that the prophet Isaiah was commanded by God to take the sackcloth off his body and walk barefoot and naked. Though he most likely had undergarments on, certainly this different way of exposure caught the eyes of many people! But, this special way of dressing (or undressing) was a way to teach the truth of God's judgment. The Jews were foolishly trusting in the military strength of the Egyptians and the Ethiopians to protect them against the Assyrians. But, Isaiah dramatized what would happen to those nations which were opposed to Assyria: they would be taken captive as slaves and lose their sandals and clothing. The prophet's day-after-day eccentric clothing style must have helped the curious people wonder, "What is up with this?"

Though I wouldn't encourage any of us to walk around as Isaiah did, I do think a judicious use of some drama can help illustrate doctrine. Over the past 13 years as a pastor, I have dressed up like Moses to talk about faith (Hebrews 11:23-29); Harbonah (a servant from Esther 7:9), to teach about God's sovereignty; and Saint Patrick (on Saint Patrick's Day) to talk about evangelism and missions. The congregation I serve appreciated these three occasions when I made the effort to help them understand these doctrines in a different way. They also overlooked my weak acting ability.

Have you ever dramatized a sermon or a Sunday School lesson? Have you ever considered acting out a short skit in order to illustrate an important truth? If you are shy, do you know someone in your congregation who has some dramatic ability? Could they be used to bring out doctrinal truth? Drama can be very effective when used sparingly, yet wisely, to supplement the regular diet of expository preaching.

The Prophets Sometimes Used Props

The prophet Ezekiel was directed by the Lord to use some interesting props. In Ezekiel 4, God's servant drew a picture of the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and made a metal wall. He then proceeded to make models of war implements and set these against the city. Ezekiel was told to eat and drink in measured amounts while he lay on his side and faced the city.

Why did God have Ezekiel do this? The models were used illustrate the coming siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Because the Southern Kingdom had sinned repeatedly against the Lord, Jerusalem would be surrounded and defeated by her dreaded enemy. The models helped bring to people's minds the coming reality of God's judgment against them.

Models and props may on occasion be effectively used today to illustrate doctrine. One pastor borrowed his son's basketball shoes as a prop. He put them on just before he preached, and when he came out to speak in a suit and tie, plus hi-top brand name basketball shoes, he had the audience's attention. As he spoke about our materialistic society, his congregation could both see and hear what he was talking about.

Use physical objects. My twenty- year-old daughter is active in a church while she is away at college. She speaks very highly of her church and serves there by working with the teenagers on

Wednesday nights. During a recent Christmas break she begged me to go to her "away from home" church. "Dad," she said, "I really want you to come to my church. The preacher is awesome." I had a Sunday of vacation so the whole family (wife and 6 kids) made the long drive for the service.

At the service, the Pastor expounded 1 Chronicles 11:15-19, and spoke about worship. In the passage, some of David's men risked their lives to provide their leader with water from Bethlehem. Upon receiving the water, David was so thankful to God for surrounding his life with faithful warriors, he respectfully poured the water out to the Lord in worship.

During the 45 minutes of preaching, the Pastor took a clear pitcher full of water and at appropriate times poured a bit of water on the platform. While he was speaking and pouring, he talked about how we can worship the Lord by simple steps of obedience such as: taking care of children, doing our work well, etc. Other passages of Scripture were cross-referenced as little by little the water was poured out. When the pitcher was empty, he spoke about how Christ was poured out for us.

More than a year later, I remember that message about worship. The sight of water flowing out of a pitcher helped bring the point home. The prop wasn't overdone. The prop wasn't superior to the Scriptures. The prop wisely used helped teach the importance of worship.

As Christian teachers we hold the Word of life out to a dying world. In addition to expository preaching, why not occasionally use some of the ways the prophets used to get God's Word across: stories, drama and props.

Our goal is to get sound doctrine into the minds and hearts of our audience. Biblical instruction must be the foundation for all our ministries. But the prophets demonstrate some of the possibilities for creatively teaching doctrine. Remember: we have an obligation to be right, but are under no obligation to be dull. God's prophets were anything but dull.

1 Adam Liptak. "Judge's Rhyming Ruse Fails To Amuse." Sydney Morning Herald, Dec. 16, 2002.

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9-11, Jesus & the Truth about Tragedy

Nate Walker

Were we surprised by the events of September 11, 2001? Granted, I know they happened suddenly, but should we be surprised? After all, our Lord Jesus Christ has warned us ahead of time what life will be like before the end (Mk 13:8). Wars, uprisings and violence are merely the beginning of birth pangs. While these things are characteristic of the day in which we live, nevertheless, we are not to think that wars and violence are unavoidable, nor complacently believe that we have no responsibility for helping to avoid them altogether (hence all the recent debate over "just war" theories with Iraq).

But how should we, as Christians, view tragedies like these? We seem to have many false notions in our society that our lives should be blessed with health, wealth, freedom and peace. After all, these things are our inalienable rights as Americans, the people upon whom God smiles, right?! This is the reason that, when a tragedy like 9-11 strikes this country, we feel disenfranchised,

"ripped-off" and gripped with a sense that somehow we have been treated improperly or unfairly. As a result of our disappointment, the Truth often suffers. Many people begin taking God to task over such tragedies. His goodness is called into question, His mysterious actions (or inaction) in providence are given one-sided human explanations and His character is defamed. Some even begin to cast doubts as to His very existence. We have all heard the statements in print or on the news, "Where is God?", "How could God let this happen?", "God did not cause this, nor could He have prevented it" or "This is God's judgment". But instead of inventing reasons for why God may have allowed this tragedy, instead of rationalizing if God is good, or whether He is all-powerful, we simply need to turn to the Scriptures to get Jesus' take on tragedy. There and only there will we get the TRUTH.

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:1-5 NASB).

Upon our first glance at this passage, we see that tragedy was just as common in Jesus' day as it is in ours. His world was just as marred by sin as ours with towers falling and despotic politicians ruling. Scripture is consistent in relating that Jesus lived in the same sin-sick, dying world that we do. The important thing for us then, is to gain Jesus' perspective and learn the Truth about tragedy that He has to teach us.

The Bane of Our Existence

While Jesus does not deny the fact that the death of those under Pilate or those killed by the crashing of the tower was a great tragedy, at the same time He does not for an instant imagine that their deaths are not deserved. Jesus is quick to point out to those people surrounding Himself that "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish". That is, that death is the consequence and the result of sin, the very bane of our existence. This is the consistent teaching of the Scriptures, contrary to the world in which we live. While death truly is a great tragedy, it is a tragedy introduced into the world by the rebellion and sin of mankind (Rom 5:12). Therefore, it is a tragedy that we are all facing and it is deserved by all, regardless of how and when it happens. So then, for Jesus, the tragedy is not the circumstances of how death occurs, but the issue of death itself.

While the curse of death reigns over all mankind, we must refuse to treat it in a friendly manner. Jesus warns of death here as something final. Too often in our society, death is welcomed because of severe illness, when people mistakenly think that death would be better than life. I recently heard a doctor on a talk show explain that death is a disease which can be cured. But the Scriptures tell us plainly that death is the enemy, one that Jesus Christ Himself came to give us victory over when we repent and trust in Him (I Cor 15:26).

When death comes, we must realize that it indeed is a tragedy, not because of how it happens, whether at the hands of a ruthless governor or at the scene of an accident, but because it is the direct result of sinful, rebellious man living in a fallen world which God has cursed. Death is something that we all deserve as creatures in rebellion against our Creator (Gen 2:16-17). But God has also promised deliverance from this curse, this enemy, through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:23). Through His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus Christ has once and for all time secured our victory over death and its slavery to sin (Heb 2:14-15). Praise God that He has reversed the curse in the person of Christ, and that this reversal can be ours through Him!

Superstitions Surrounding Tragedy

We hear daily of many tragedies around the globe. Do we ever assume that the people who die in these tragedies are "worse than us"? Moral superiority is perhaps the greatest superstition surrounding most tragedies. Folks do not always say it, but they intimate it in their comments. But Jesus maintains in this passage (v.4) that those who perish in these circumstances are not worse than those who go to their grave in old age. Many would have us believe that some deaths (eg. plane crashes while smuggling drugs) are the judgment of God. But we must carefully think through such reasoning. In Psalm 73, it appears that the wicked may be doing better than the righteous in this life. The Psalmist realizes in this passage that judgment is future (v.17). God does not punish people for their sin in this life because that is the very reason for eternity (Heb 9:27). God has an appointment for all men, and judgment will follow. And, it is an appointment that no one will miss!

Others would have us believe that the secret operations of God's hand in the universe are known to them. They know all the ins and outs, ups and downs, reasons and whys of God's dealings with mankind. They know why God would allow the Auca Indians to kill five faithful missionaries and yet let dictators like Hitler run free to kill millions. For them the providence of God is not mystery, but simple math and math that they can calculate. But, has not God chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise (1 Cor 1-2)? Are not His ways far above our ways and His thoughts above our thoughts (Isa 55)? Like Job, who are we to darken the counsel of God by words without knowledge? Will we really instruct God (Job 38)? True wisdom calls us to be wary of all such explanations.

We are all too often quick to assume many superstitions in the face of death. "This one or that one must be more evil and sinful, that is the reason for their death." Recently I had a funeral for an infant. It would have been foolish for me to suggest to the parents that their child died because he was more evil than another. We must constantly focus upon the great mercies of God. This is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah does as he laments the condition of Israel. Israel has been pillaged and exiled, but it is because of the mercies of God that they are not totally consumed (Lam 3:21-23). We are all sinful and deserve death, but those who go on living do not deserve any less! It is then the mercies and forbearance of the Lord that any of us continue to live. Instead of being Pharisaical and believing that our own goodness is what keeps us going, let us all acknowledge in humble dependence upon the Lord that we are here by His grace and mercies which come to us each morning and carry us throughout each day. Let us all confess like James, that we do not know what tomorrow holds and are utterly dependent upon the will of God for all His blessings (Js 4:14-16).

Reminders For Repentance

Twice in this passage Jesus teaches us that all such tragic episodes in life serve as reminders for repentance. Instead of serving as vehicles for us to understand the ways of God, Jesus plainly tells us that tragic circumstances like these serve to tell us something about ourselves. God uses such disasters to call attention to our own problem with sin. C.S. Lewis used to say that God shouts to us in our pain. Like wisdom personified, the Lord is calling out to us in our own streets to hear His voice and discern our own need regarding our sin. Sin is lying in wait at the door to consume us and judgment awaits around the next corner--it is time to repent. Even the prophet Amos elaborates on God's call to repentance in chapter 4. God has sent tragedy after tragedy, famine, pestilence and plague, yet the people have failed to repent and turn to Him. There is only one thing left to do, "prepare to meet your God" (Amos 4:12). So judgment becomes an imminent reality to those who miss the Lord's clarion call to repentance.

But what we also fail to realize is that the relative peace we experience through the absence of tragedy is a blessing of God. God gives no guarantees in this life to freedom from disaster and tragedy. Yet, this peace is in no way merited by us, nor is it our due for being good citizens. It is

rather a display of God's long-suffering and graciousness to us. Peter tells us to regard the patience of God as salvation (II Pet 3:15). It is our Lord, by His grace, granting us a window of opportunity to turn to Him and be saved.

I think that the Truth of Jesus and 9-11 can be summed up in that little, well known saying, "Life is short, death is sure, sin's the cause, but Christ the cure." Life is short when we consider that seventy years is a blessing from God (Ps 90:10). We have traded the crown of life for sin and ended up with death, woe to us (Lam 5:16)! But, praise be to God "for He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14). In tragedy, the Truth of God is revealed: the Truth about our cursed existence and need for Christ; the Truth of God's impending judgment; and the Truth of God's gracious call to repentance. May the Lord use us as His instruments of Truth and grace through the tragedies we may face this coming year.

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Editor's Note: Dan Germann, New Tribes Mission's vice chairman, and a member of the mission's contingency team since 1993, presented this message at a conference for NTM missionaries one week after Martin Burnham's homegoing. It has been edited for print.

For Such A Time As This

Dan Germann

A young couple needed to flee. To stay meant that their young son would be killed. They went to a neighboring country to hide, then returned. Some years later, foreign soldiers, to the cries of an angry mob, killed their son. He was in his early 30s.

Of course we're talking about the Lord Jesus.

Christ was no stranger to risk. His whole earthly life was surrounded by it. He faced evil kings. He lived under Roman oppression. His teaching angered the Jewish leadership. His cousin was beheaded. Yet God the Father remained compassionate, powerful, kind, gentle, all-knowing.

At a time when the whole world is thinking about risk, we need to remember that Jesus understands (Hebrews 4:15), and the Father treats us as His children. We need to step back and ask God to shape our understanding. Let's consider the story of Esther.

For such a time as this...

Shushan is the capital of the mighty Persian Empire, which stretches from India to Ethiopia and to the edge of Greece. Judah, the southern kingdom, has been led into captivity. Its people have been scattered, and there are Jews throughout the Persian nation.

King Xerxes has tried to conquer Greece, but has failed. He dispatches people to accomplish tasks and routinely kills those who fail. Even the most influential are in danger. Haman's plot has now put the entire seed of Abraham at risk.

Xerxes has just banished his queen, Vashti, and Mordecai has arranged for his cousin, Esther, to be planted on the frontlines. She's the new queen. She has never revealed her identity to the king, but she's a Jew.

Mordecai's words were something like this: "Go to the king to beg for mercy and plead with him for your people." Esther sent back word that this wouldn't be possible: "Enter without permission and I'll die."

Mordecai answers: "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Could it be that God has been preparing New Tribes Mission "for such a time as this?"

At a meeting with a leader from another mission, I told him the news of the memorial service for Rick Tenenoff, Mark Rich and Dave Mankins. (Rick, Mark and Dave, NTM missionaries, were kidnapped from Panama in 1993 and slain in Colombia in 1996). He responded, "Danny, do you understand how the other mission agencies look at NTM with a sense of wonder at what God is doing among you? We wonder about the special role that God is preparing for NTM. You've seen so many of your folks killed and that has to be changing you."

We've just buried Martin Burnham. How is all of this shaping NTM?

In his editorial, "Burnhams Are a Great Role Model," Cal Thomas wrote: "Missionaries' work always has been dangerous. Whether missionaries confront disease, discouragement or loneliness, the work is forever challenging. Now, in an age in which terrorists might see unarmed, defenseless missionaries as inviting targets, the danger is greater."

Could it be that God is taking what has been a difficult time for NTM to shape us into vessels He will use for such a time as this?

If I perish, I perish

In Esther 4:15 and 16 we read: "Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!'"

We share Esther's concern that people pray for us, and we appreciate those prayers. And in this context it is clear that Esther's statement, "If I perish, I perish," is not one of glib resignation. It's not the equivalent of today's "whatever." Rather, it's a declaration that her well-being, her very life, is in God's hands.

Esther's words are reflected by Paul, when he said that he didn't count his life dear unto himself. Risk will push us to the edge of considering whether or not we are willing to lay down our lives. But let's make sure our motivation is clear.

For great causes men are willing to die. Rescue workers on Sept. 11, 2001, risked their lives for a higher cause, and they became heroes. Military recruiters are finding their task a lot easier as young men and women line up to be a part of a higher cause.

Preaching the Gospel is a great cause. But that is not what motivates us as individuals or as New Tribes Mission. Rather, God's love and commitment to us, as His children, motivate us.

Our response is, "I'll give my life to You, Lord." For people or causes we may measure the sacrifice. But for God, we will not count our lives dear. We are passionate about the One we follow. "If I perish, I perish." What's important is God.

NTM values a willingness to sacrifice. But sacrifice for its own sake is foolishness. We value a willingness to sacrifice because of God. Then no sacrifice seems too large. We live for what's eternal, and that gives perspective to everything else. "If I perish, I perish."

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7,8). Paul knew what it was like to live for what's eternal, and to be willing to lay down his life for Christ.

Jesus explained to His disciples: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

There is great risk in missions today. And along with Esther we're ready to risk all. "If I perish, I perish."

Mitigating risk

So how should NTM handle risk? With confidence that our lives belong to God.

Consider these biblical examples of risk management:

Matthew 10 teaches us about the principle we addressed earlier: "He who find his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (v. 39). At the same time, verse 23 says: "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another."

Acts 9:23-25, speaking of Paul, says: "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket."

And Acts 14:4-7 provides another example: "But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there."

God provided ways to move away from risk. These were manageable situations with specific solutions.

But what do we do when risk is no longer manageable, when there are no apparent solutions? What happens when we must choose between living with life-threatening risk, or permanent evacuation and eventual abandonment of the ministry?

This is rare, but it can and does happen.

There are no easy answers. No formulas give us an exact readout of what to do. Consider these verses:

"After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him" (John 7:1).

On another occasion, "He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?'" (John 11:7-8).

Like Jesus, we should long to follow the will of the Father, wherever He leads us. Whether it's moving away from risk or having a face-off with risk, our lives are in God's hands. The cause is great, and greater than the cause is the One to whom we surrender our very lives.

Who's going to take the Gospel to a world that's full of risk?

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Four Keys to Balancing Tact & Confrontation

R. Larry Moyer

When I first came to Christ, I was too confrontational. I didn't use much tact. Now I feel that I'm so tactful that I don't confront people soon enough about their eternal destiny. Somehow I think I've missed the balance.

The church leader who said that to me was right. Some people don't know what tact is in evangelism and therefore could hardly be described as "harmless as doves." They often offend more people than they win. It's been said about such people, "He witnesses to everyone he meets. You can tell them by their haggard looks." Others though are so tactful, they never ask, "Is there anything keeping you from trusting Christ right now?" Their evangelism lacks a biblical understanding of the brevity of life and the urgent need of salvation.

The answer is balance. The question is, "How do you obtain it?" Allow me to emphasize four keys that will help you find just the right balance between tact and confrontation.

One key is experience.

As with many areas of Christian living, the more one evangelizes, the better he is at it. Evangelism cannot be learned in a classroom. It has to be learned in the field. The more experience you obtain, you learn how to read people's expressions, listen to how they say what they say, and make comparisons. Soon you develop a skill of reading people and situations. That doesn't mean you are always perfect (and God doesn't expect you to be). It simply means you are better at sizing up situations and know when to proceed and when to back off.

A second key is dependency on the Holy Spirit.

God is not asking you to evangelize alone. The Great Commission says, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). The way He is with you is through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, evangelism is not you using God. It is God using you. God, through the "inner nudgings" (for lack of better words) of the Holy Spirit, helps you develop spiritual maturity in evangelism to know where that proper balance is.

A third key is prayer for boldness.

People who confront without tact have usually not developed spiritual maturity in evangelism. They are sometimes confrontational because they are taking God's responsibility on their shoulders. However, those who have tact without confrontation often lack boldness. They are afraid to ask the lost, "Why not trust Christ today?" I can tell you from personal experience that every single time I've sense "This is a time I must be confrontational," I've felt fear. But as soon as I prayed, "God give me boldness," I felt freedom to speak up, not clam up.

The fourth key is understanding the sowing and reaping principle.

Jesus taught in John 4:37, "One sows and another reaps." Every time you talk with a lost person ask yourself, "Am I here to sow or am I here to reap?" That question is critical. The person who is so tactful that he won't confront seldom asks, "Is this a situation where God wants me to reap?"

By the same token, those who are too confrontational seldom ask, "Is this a situation where God wants me to merely sow?"

The issue is not should we be tactful or should we be confrontational. Both are necessary. These four keys help achieve a much needed balance.

From "ToolBox," a free quarterly publication by EvanTell (available at www.evantell.org or 800-947-7359). Used by permission.

CHAPLAIN'S DIARY

Christmas Ministry in Saudi Arabia

by CH (CPT) Matthew Kreider

As you can imagine, Christmas for me was much different than I have ever experienced. Yet God is good and He provided for me and my family in unique ways. The steady improvement of technology has made deployments more bearable than in the past. With access to e-mail, phones, digital cameras and now the web cam the hardship of being away has been minimized to some extent. But let me also say that it is still difficult. Thanks to a web cam at home and one here in my office I was able to participate in our family Christmas celebration. Cindy and the girls sat in our study back at Ft. Bliss while I was in my office in Saudi Arabia and I was able to read the Christmas account out of Luke 2 to my family via web cam. Each of us prayed thanking God for the gift of Jesus and then proceeded to open gifts. The sights and sounds of Christmas with family were an enjoyable "treat" during the harsh reality of a major military build-up in the Area of Operations.

We had a wonderful Christmas Eve Candlelight service here at Eskan Village, Saudi Arabia. Over fifty attended to sing carols, read scripture and hear a Gospel message. Afterwards we had a Christmas dessert "potluck" as people brought goodies shipped from home, bartered with someone from the dining facility for pies and some even attempted home baked goods in their villa kitchens. We had a great time celebrating Christmas eve together.

An added blessing here in Riyadh has been my active involvement at the U.S. Embassy. I have had the privilege of speaking there many times leading a truly international service. What an incredible blessing to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a group of people who can literally touch every continent of the globe for God's glory. How thrilling to be part of the Great Commission!! The Ambassador and the Assistant Army Attaché have been invaluable to help spread the Good News. Please pray for that congregation, that God would protect those who come to worship because they are literally risking their lives. Pray for ministry resources to safely get into the hands of those who need them so they can be fed and nurtured in the Truth.

The embassy hosted a first-ever collective worship service a couple of weeks ago. For the first time in the history of Riyadh hundreds of Christians gathered in one place to lift the name of Jesus. I met a man who had just been released from prison days earlier after months of solitary confinement. He was a ministry leader in Riyadh arrested for preaching the Gospel. He was sentenced to death by beheading, but by God's grace through the work of the Ambassador he was released. He will most likely be deported. There were others there who also had suffered persecution because of their faith. The faith of the martyred was also remembered and celebrated that evening. As you can imagine, it was one of those events that change one's perspective of ministry and worship for ever. These people poured out their lives in worship to God. To say I was touched and moved by their awe of God and His mighty provision is an understatement.

We are so blessed in the States and we don't even know it. We complain if traffic slows us down on our way to a \$3 million building and then grumble if the pastor preaches even a minute longer than we expect. These people are begging for solid teaching and will gladly stay as long as the preacher is still talking.

Cindy and the girls are doing as well as to be expected. Our planned return to Ft. Bliss has been indefinitely put off. We no longer have a redeployment date. Although this isn't too much of a surprise, it is always harder to be away when there is no end in sight. We are all trying to speculate on what tomorrow holds, but that is neither comforting nor advisable because we just don't know. How comforting, though, to know the One who sovereignly holds all things together. He knows what tomorrow holds and He has promised to never leave or forsake me. Therein is the secret to peace in the midst of chaos and the unknown.

Thank you for your support. I am hoping to be home in time for the 2003 Convention in Los Angeles, but it is hard to plan for that now.

In His mighty power,
For God & Country!
Matthew S. Kreider
Chaplain (CPT) USA
Task Force Chaplain

SHERIFF CHAPLAIN MINISTRY

Ride Along

by Russell A. Gabler

Dr. Russell Gabler, a retired pastor is serving as a Chaplain in the Los Angeles, California Sheriff's Department. He shares his experiences in a ride along ministry with Deputy Sheriffs.

Our mission statement says: "The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Chaplains are dedicated to providing for the spiritual, moral and personal needs of the Department personnel and their families."

One method I use to accomplish this mission is to go to the Carson Sheriff Station and ride in the patrol car with the deputies. Sometimes I have opportunity to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ to the deputies and to the public.

Recently as the deputy and I were cruising around the city we received a call to go to a public school. A 14-year-old male student had skipped class and climbed up on the roof of the school building. When other students and teachers asked him to come down he threatened to jump. When we arrived at the scene he was sitting with a friend on the step of the fire truck. The firemen, teacher and principal were talking to him. My deputy also spoke to the student with very stern statements about how selfish he was to threaten to harm himself. If he had succeeded in killing himself his parents and friends would all feel very sad. It was very foolish also, the deputy explained, because he would most likely only severely injure himself with a broken limb or neck and maybe cripple himself for the rest of his life.

After awhile the father arrived and talked with the principal who explained how frequently his son had missed classes and been a problem at the school. When everyone else finished speaking to the boy I sat down next to him and spoke with him. I asked about his family. He explained his mother had divorced his father and left them. He was angry at her for that. He was very unhappy living with his father and wanted to go live with his grandmother in a distant city. I asked if he

and his family were religious. He replied "no" but said his grandmother is. He said he does believe in God, in Jesus and go to church once in a great while.

I asked why he did such a crazy thing as to climb up on the roof. He explained how many of his school peers picked on him, mistreated him, made fun of him, etc. However he had discovered if he did strange unusual things his peers would think he was crazy and would then be afraid of him and stay away from him. I explained to him that I am not a police officer and then explained what a chaplain is. I explained that God created him, and is interested in being his friend, helping him with his problems. I explained how God sent His only Son Jesus to die for our sins to pay our penalty. I said that the Lord wants to give you a better happier and good life with worthwhile goals.

That was my sixth ride along with that deputy. When his shift ended at 6 p.m. I was assigned to another deputy. He recently finished training and was in the patrol car by himself for only the second week. During my four hours with him I had very friendly open conversations about his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That same week two days before when I was at home studying for my sermon, our phone rang about 8 p.m. It was one of the sheriff sergeants asking me if I was busy. She explained where she was in our city at a home where the 57-year-old father of 7 children had hanged himself in his backyard. His wife and children and grandchildren were all there now and were very broken up and overcome with shock and grief. The sergeant explained that she didn't know what to do and asked: "Chaplain, could you possibly come over here and help us?" So I got dressed, put on my chaplain's jacket and drove to the location. I spent a couple hours talking, listening, quoting God's word and praying with the heart-broken family members.

About two weeks later at the station that sergeant showed me a card and thank-you note the family had mailed to the station. They expressed deep appreciation to the deputies, officers and chaplain for the kindness, comfort and compassionate help they had received in their time of terrible trauma.

Please remember in prayer your Chaplains in the missionary ministries of Military Chaplaincy; Prison Chaplaincy; Sheriff, Police, and Fire Department Chaplaincies; and Hospital Chaplaincies (VA and civilian). If you would like to pursue any of these fruitful ministries please contact me:

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Heart-Stopping News

Alice Zuiderveen

In the waiting room of the ER, I watched for the doctor to come and say I could go in with my husband. I was totally confident that the Lord would see him through this heart attack, just as He'd brought him through sudden open heart surgery eleven years ago and a stint implant nine years later. Three weeks ago the cardiologist had said Larry was doing great.

After what seemed like hours, the doctor came out.

"May I go in now?" I asked eagerly.

The doctor sat down. "Let's talk here for a minute." He began explaining procedures they had done since the ambulance first arrived at our home, how medications had been administered to

their fullest. Then he stopped. I waited for him to make his point, but he didn't go on. Suddenly, I felt a cold stab through my heart. No, that couldn't be--or was it? Finally, with all the courage I could muster, I asked quietly, "Is he already gone?"

The doctor reiterated, "We did everything we could."

I sat in stunned silence as the awful realization began to flood over me. MY husband? Was he saying MY husband hadn't made it? I knew any minute someone would burst through the door to say Larry had revived. He couldn't really be gone. God would not do that! Not now--two months before his 59th birthday.

Yesterday, Larry had worked a full day. His building business was booming. His love for the Lord and his determination to serve and witness for Him had never been stronger. We both looked forward to serving God, even on mission fields, during our retirement years, though we would never retire--just slow down as needed. Larry saw his work as a great opportunity to be used by the Lord in various lives. I managed the books and office, and Larry often mentioned what a good team we made.

Our marriage had become a wonderful joyous union, after surviving some years of turmoil as we struggled to learn our biblical roles. We had just built our "dream" home in the country. Larry was still finishing the big barn for his tools and equipment. I couldn't bear the thought of losing my best friend and companion.

Our children--oh no! Seven of our nine, with their families, were coming this very day from their distant homes for our annual weekend reunion. Our youngest daughter had recently announced she was pregnant with their first child. We would celebrate another daughter's 40th birthday today. Surely God would not do this to the children!

I felt dizzy as I tried to grasp the truth, still waiting, believing someone would soon come to tell us his pulse and breathing had resumed. No one came. The doctor broke the silence. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," I said numbly, not meaning it.

Disbelief and shock finally gave way to a flood of horror and the beginning of grief. I cried out to the Lord, voicing promises from the Psalms and other Bible passages.

So often I had found comfort in those verses, but never had I needed them as desperately as now. "I cried out to God with my voice...and He gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord" (Psalm 77:1- 2).

My husband's best friend had come as soon as he heard we were at the hospital. As I sobbed, he spoke caringly. "As painful as this is for us, Larry's not crying."

That remark helped me many times in the coming months. This event was no mistake; the Lord had planned it long ago. His perfect plan for my husband, for me, for our children, and all others who would be affected included Larry's death on July 6, 2001. For Larry, it was wonderful!

All nine of our children, with their families, did indeed come for the weekend, but we had a much different kind of reunion than we had planned. We saw how the Lord had gone before each of us, preparing the way for even this most dreaded event. We thanked and praised Him for the love He had given our family, and for the comfort He now gave. Together we planned the funeral. We decided to sing and play music Larry had loved, to honor him and to draw hearts to the Lord.

Living without my cherished husband these past nineteen months has not been easy. Every aspect of my life has changed--except the Lord. True to His word, He is faithful, loving, kindhearted, compassionate, and unchanging. He will never leave me nor forsake me. I often feel like a child who runs, falls, and cries out in pain. Immediately, the loving parent scoops her up, kisses her hurts, and holds her close until she feels better. Each time the painful stab of grief strikes another blow into my heart, the Lord is there with His love and comfort. Soon I'm able again to focus on following His plan for me, a plan that seems but a fog some days. But I trust Him to lead me, one step at a time. I pray that I will walk closely with Him, bringing glory and honor and praise to His name in everything I do or say, so that I may one day hear those words my husband no doubt heard, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Alice E. Zuiderveen lives in Warsaw, IN, where she serves as organist for Pleasant View Bible Church. She also enjoys teaching the Bible, counseling women, and visiting her nine children, twenty-three grandchildren and two great grandchildren. This article is from Chera Fellowship (Winter, 2003) which may be ordered by individual widows/widowers or in bulk orders by churches and is useful when ministering to those who have lost a mate.

The Re-Birth of One Local Church

Mike Smith

Bible Church Crusade Director

What do you do when the local church is down to nine members, including the interim pastor and his wife, and there are only two elders (one of whom is overseas part-time) and one deacon? Such was the case in August 2001 for Westbrae Bible Church of Berkeley, CA. At one time this church was holding two morning services with over 200 attending. In the late 1940s, past IFCA President Bob Graves' father was the pastor. Bob and his wife Joyce were married there, his brother Dan was once the pastor, and Bob and his son Jeff each served as interim pastors. In the 1970s, Dr Paul Reiter (now a professor at Appalachian Bible College) was pastor. Some would say it was time to close the church and sell the property. In fact, the church had considered just this scenario. Instead, the church leadership contacted the Regional Executive Committee of the Northern CA Regional for assistance. After prayerful investigation, the task was given to Bible Church Crusade for its direction. BCC made the offer to guide the Westbrae congregation through this difficult situation, which they accepted. The BCC Director and two board members (both local pastors) joined the Westbrae Elder Board. In time, after much prayer and many meetings, God brought His answer in Pastor John Shim and the congregation of Eastbay Baptist Church (then of Oakland). As of May, 2002, Eastbay Baptist Church of Berkeley is meeting in the Westbrae Bible Church facilities, and God's local church is re-born and effectively ministering in the community and on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. The attendance in the two morning services is over 200. Discipleship, evangelism and Bible institute classes are ongoing both at the church and various locations on campus. The BCC representatives and Pastor John Shim serve as the Elder Board of Westbrae Bible and in an advisory capacity to Eastbay Baptist. The churches look to the day when the merger is complete and the independent local church is once again ministering on its own.