

A Paradigm Shift:

Or a shift within the church from a focus on Christ to a focus on people, programs and prosperity.

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Preamble

Frank E. Peretti wrote in the front of his novel *Prophet*, “In case you were wondering, this novel is a creative work of fiction imparting spiritual truth in a symbolic manner, and not an emphatic statement of religious doctrine. As usual, while I *am* dealing with real ideas, I *am not* writing about any real person, places or institutions.” The same holds true with *Paradigm Shift*.

M. Scott Peck, M.D. wrote in his Introduction to *People of the Lie*, “This is a dangerous publication. I have written it because I believe it is needed. I believe its over-all effect will be healing. But I have also written it with trepidation. It has potential for harm. It will cause some readers pain. Worse, some may misuse its information to harm others. I apologize to my readers and to the public for the harm this book may cause, and I plead with you to handle it with care. One meaning of care is love. Be gentle and loving with yourself if you find what is written causing you pain. And please be gentle and loving with those neighbors you may come to understand as evil. Be careful – full of care.” These are my sentiments exactly about this publication. Please read it with love and respond with care.

Neil Eskelin said in his book, *Leading With Love*, “Power has shifted from the corporate executive to the consumer, from the politician to the voters, from the teacher to the student, and from the preacher to those in the pew.” It is an absolute fact, that the political power has now

shifted from the preacher to those in the pew and yet I believe it is very sad. Some of the people in the pew have now become the dictators and power mongers that they have accused the preacher of being. My contention is that the power does not belong with the preacher or to those in the pew – it belongs to God. The power behind every church should not be the persuasive personality of the preacher or the tyrannical tyranny of the laymen – it should be the absolute power of Word and Sacrament.

A Paradigm Shift is not limited to one single congregation or denomination, but is beginning to dominate as a model for ministry on a global scale. There is an insidious fiend rearing its ugly head in the Christian churches today, called the “Church Growth Movement” (CGM). It is also found in other guises, such as selfishness, egotism, favoritism, secularism, entertainment, parts of the Christian educational system, some of Christian Contemporary Music (CCM), business paradigms, pop psychology, psychobabble, social club mentality, clergy abuse (abuse *of* the clergy, not *by* the clergy) and what is increasingly being seen by some as a number of clergy being spiritually abused by a small handful of their own members and denominational leadership – which outwardly appears to have a form of godliness but denies its power (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

To help understand the inroads of CGM, read the following job descriptions:

PRESIDENT OF SEMINARY

To fill a vacancy the Seminary invites voting members to submit the names of candidates for the office of president of the Seminary. Nominees must be theologically trained men listed in the yearbook under “Pastors-Active.” The president serves as the chief executive officer. As such, he sets the tone for the institution. The seminary’s Governing Board looks to the president to further the seminary’s objective of preparing thoroughly trained candidates for the ministerium, graduates who are confessional in stance; evangelical in approach; mission-minded in spirit, culturally sensitive; appropriately flexible; and zealous both to nurture and to equip the saints. The board looks to the president to represent the seminary before the constituency. Historically, the seminary president has taught a class or classes. The board desires that the new president do the same.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE MINISTER

The successful candidate will be one or more of the following: an ordained minister, an individual with an advanced degree in theology, or be a lay person actively and committedly involved in a church’s ministry - and embrace ministerial thought. This person should be conversant in the fundamentals of the Christian faith and understand and endorse the mission and ministry of this church. Significant knowledge of and a high degree of dedication to church

ministry and biblical tenets as evidenced in church positions previously held is imperative. Additionally, the candidate must have 15-20 years of successful leadership and progressive management experience and responsibilities some of which has occurred in a for-profit arena with a thorough understanding of budget, financial, and fiscal management as well as human resource management (i.e., have a successful track record in operational oversight of a growing organization).

Notice in both job descriptions how the candidates are described. First of all they are called CEO and CEM. The seminary is called an institution. The CEO of the seminary is to train candidates who are culturally sensitive and appropriately flexible. May God have mercy on the candidate who is not culturally sensitive and especially appropriately flexible or he will find himself being forced to resign by an ardent administrator or zealous congregation who subjectively do not believe he is cultural or flexible enough. As for the CEM, he does not even have to be an ordained minister. He only needs to be conversant in the fundamentals and must endorse the mission and ministry of the church. That is the key – if a person does not endorse the mission and ministry of any particular church, as it is defined subjectively by the church body or by certain individual members within a given church, then be prepared to face a forced resignation. Be prepared to be scrutinized for your leadership and management abilities, not your abilities to preach, teach or administer the sacraments. Be prepared to be judged by for-profit thought processes and not always by Christians who have the best interest of Christ's Church in mind. Be prepared to be judged according to your ability to be successful in growing an organization, not in your ability to share and strengthen faith according to God's Word.

Am I writing this because I am angry, bitter, disgruntled or want to get even? If anyone even suggests such a thing, they definitely have never met me or if they have, they have not bothered to take the time to find out what kind of person I really am. A wise man once told me, "Only total confession can bring total healing." I am writing this for one reason only – to totally confess and give glory to Christ. My single goal in life is to give Him the glory. *Paradigm Shift* is a trumpet blast and warning to the world that there is a drastic paradigm shift going on in the modern church – from a focus on Christ and His love and mercy to a focus on people, money, programs, secular expertise, selfishness, egotism, favoritism, all of which can have a form of godliness but deny the power and glory of Christ. By confessing Christ and giving Him the glory, my hope is to bring as much healing as possible to the visible church.

Is it going overboard in saying that this is what is happening on a global scale? As a result of forced resignations, numerous pastors (well over a hundred) told me they shared very similar experiences. Copious comments from others include, “We haven't met, but we have met with very similar circumstances.” “I wish I had known that you were contemplating such a drastic move. The ‘charges’ were remarkably similar to those leveled against me.” “The reasons for resigning were no back up from denominational leadership for called workers and like you mentioned before, no support from the congregational leadership against disgruntled members who were pushing Church Growth.” “Welcome to the ‘good of the ministry’ club. I resigned ‘for the good of the ministry.’ Although the ‘presenting problem’ was not a focus on God’s Word, I can’t help thinking that this was the real driving force. Without getting into all kinds of details, I do see a real problem with a perception of the ministry. The time honored qualification of faithfulness to God’s Word has been replaced with personality, professionalism, and performance. And, of course, performance must be measured in numbers, especially numbers of people on the membership roster and dollar numbers on the congregational balance sheet.” May God rebuke those who hold anything above God’s Word!

In Revelation 3:1-3 it says, “These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” The time has come for the Christian church to “wake up” and clearly see that you are dead when your focus is not on Christ. Those within the Christian Church need to strengthen what remains and is about to die. Stop the **focus** on buildings, programs, dollars and secularism and return to Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Repent of any egotism, self-centeredness, favoritism, social club mentality and return to make your deeds complete in the sight of God, which can only be accomplished through the shed blood of Christ and true faith in Him. To Christ be the glory.

Do Not Just Sit In The Pew – DO SOMETHING

Zechariah 13:7 says, “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” In 1 Timothy 4:13 it says, “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:5 says, “do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” No where does the Bible say, “The pastor must do the work of an administrator, be a CEO, push programs, pop psychology, secular ideology or business paradigms. What does St. Paul say to Pastor Timothy? He says in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” What are some of these “myths”? Could they be the “myths” being generated by the Church Growth Movement and business paradigms? Could they be the “myths” of secularism, psychobabble, programs and fund raisers being pushed by denominational and church leaders?

Whether we choose to admit it or not, we are facing the martyrdom of the ministerial office on a global scale. Ministers around the world are being forced to resign, “for the good of the ministry,” when the “ministry” is being defined as programs, schools beset with secular ideology, fund raisers, administrative functions, etc. and not preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments. Small groups within churches are declaring they have “no confidence” in their pastor, not based on preaching, teaching or administering the Sacraments, but on whether he puts his feet up on his desk, whether he wears a tie every day, whether he caters to the favorites of the congregation, whether he implements the latest and greatest programs, fashions and ideas that are being generated by the congregational or denominational leadership. This CEO or worldly mentality has taken the 8th Commandment and broken it to the extreme, as lies and slander destroy the reputation of countless faithful ministers of the Gospel and thus do irreparable harm to the ministerial office. Once a church finds out it can get rid of a

pastor through a vote of “no confidence,” the pattern continues over and over, until they can find the pastor who will play the game according to their rules and desires.

Could it possibly be that the “everyone a minister” attitude is wrong? I have heard members of a congregation say, “Pastor, you are undermining our ministry and leadership,” as if they have some corner on the ministerial and leadership market. I have seen the hire and fire way of thinking at work in innumerable situations. I have seen the Country Club frame of mind incalculable times – “Do things our way or else...” It only takes a small handful of people to undermine the ministerial office. How can a pastor protect his reputation against such slanderers? How can a pastor defend himself against erroneous and inaccurate perceptions?

Where is the outrage? Where is the global support for the ministerial office? Where is the other 95% when the 5% are being destructive? How come so few know what is going on in the background? What ever happened to standing up and fighting for what is good and right? By standing up and fighting, you are not just standing up and fighting for a pastor or any one individual – you are standing up and fighting for the honor and glory of Christ. Whenever the pastoral office is diminished, Christ is diminished. Do not let that happen. Quit sitting back and passively allowing others to divisively devastate the church and ministerium and actively defend the pastoral office against slander and the business paradigm shift. Demand Word and Sacrament ministry. Stop financially supporting churches and denominations whose major purpose appears to be largely secular in nature. Only support those churches and denominations that are wholly dedicated to Christ and His Word – not programs, paradigms and prosperity. Get rid of the so-called “Christian” schools that are no longer faithful to God’s Word, but instead are pushing secularism, entertainment, watered down theology and unfiltered Christian contemporary music. Every time you water down or trivialize God’s Word, you water down and trivialize Christ. Churches and schools that water down God’s Word can only proliferate a life blood and youth of our church that has little or no respect for Christ and His precious Word. Do not financially support churches or denominations that are more about being a social club or entertainment center than a house of worship. Demand that your leadership clearly define and unmistakably practice a Word and Sacrament ministry. Settle for nothing less than Christ and His Word. Do not give Him up for any worldly or fleshly pleasure, paradigm or program. Let

the world supply the entertainment, pop psychology and business acumen and let the Church wholly dispense the pure love of Christ and His unadulterated Word.

Forward to A Paradigm Shift

Is your church growing, stagnant or dying? Do you sometimes get the feeling that your church is shallow and scheming, instead of faith and relationship oriented? Are you occasionally suspicious that you are being more of a manipulator instead of a minister? Have you been to all the latest seminars on Church Growth, read all the self-help books, tried all the hottest new programs and nothing seems to be working? Or is the opposite true? Have you avoided all the modern colloquiums, skipped the tomes of recommendations, steered clear of all the trite, trendy programs and your church is still growing numerically? Could it be that there is another answer, another solution, one last thing you have not thought about - a different **focus** that is so completely successful that no one can deny the victorious results? If you are looking for total victory and triumph in the ministry, this is the book for you!

This publication is a labor of love and a reflection of many years of pastoral experience. It was prompted by an article published in “CHARIS: A Journal of Faculty Scholarship” published by Wisconsin Lutheran College, 8800 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53226-4699, USA. The article was written by a layman, Mr. Bruce Eberle, in the Summer 2002, Volume 2, Number 1 issue and is entitled, “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective.” Permission was granted by the editor to quote from Eberle’s article. I did not send Mr. Eberle a copy of this publication, because I wanted to clearly make the point that this publication is not intended to be a response to him or his article. This publication is not focused on any individual, or any specific church or denomination and does not necessarily reflect the views or beliefs of any particular church body. It is focused on any Christian or church, that has ever lost their **focus** on Christ and replaced it with worldly concerns. Whenever there is a direct quote I say, “Some would say...,” because Eberle is not the first one in the world to make similar comments.

If you do want to read Eberle’s article, you can find a copy of it here:

[Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective](#)

However, you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to read the article. The Acrobat Reader is free, and available for download from [Adobe's website](#).

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While you are reading this, you might enjoy listening to a song called, "Traveling Light" by Joel Hanson and Sara Groves. I consider it the perfect theme song for this publication. It can be found on a CD compilation of several singers with the title, "*Traveling Light – Songs From the 23rd Psalm.*" It was inspired by the writings of Max Lucado. Published by Creative Trust Workshop, a division of Creative Trust Ventures, 2105 Elliston Pl., Nashville, TN 37203. Manufactured and distributed by Provident Music Distribution, Inc., 741 Cool Springs Blvd., Franklin, TN 37067.

According to the article Mr. Eberle is president of Eberle Communications Group, Inc., and is a member of the Wisconsin Lutheran College Board of Regents, chairman of the CHARIS advisory board, and vice president of the Time of Grace Ministries. He lives in Vienna, Virginia. In my opinion, his article describes the work of a pastor in terms of being the Chief Executive Officer of a large corporation. He uses hard learned business principles for his examples of how a pastor should run a church. For some, what he has to say might be considered a breath of fresh air. If you want to run your church according to business principles, that is your prerogative. If Christ intended the church to be based on business principles, I have no doubt that Mr. Eberle would be absolutely correct. He obviously has had a lot of experience in the business world. I know some people that have met him and they say he is a nice gentleman. I commend him for his business acumen!

I sense Mr. Eberle is frustrated, because he wants more laypeople to be very involved on every organizational level possible. I also get the impression he believes too many pastors are acting more like dictators than ministers. Whether I am correct in my conjectures or not, I would still submit, that perhaps neither focus is correct?

I believe it is wrong when a church's **focus** is on business principles and not Christ. One reason is because churches are supposed to be volunteer organizations and it is counter-productive to apply general business, for profit, principles to a non-profit organization. After all, pastors have

zero power to hire and fire anyone. In fact, even though pastors have a divine call, usually it is the other way around – too many Christians think the pastor is a hired hand and they want to hire and fire him. As David prayed in 2 Samuel 24:14, I too have sometimes prayed, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.”

However, my main thrust is that the church is also the Church. Therefore, I believe it should be run with a **focus** on Christ, the Gospel, God’s Word and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper), not with a **focus** on business principles, people’s opinions or ideas or dreams or money. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Too many churches are serving money or pride and not God. Too many pastors and laymen are serving themselves and not God. Pastors should not be dictators and laypeople should be more concerned about Word and Sacrament ministry than money, programs, groups and artificial “ministries.” The true Church plunders people from hell and satan, not other churches!

When it comes to ministry I can only find one **focus** in the Bible. That **focus** is found in Hebrews 2:18-3:1, “Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted. Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, *fix your thoughts on Jesus*, the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.” Hebrews 12:2-3 “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus*, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart!” And Matthew 28:18-20, “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me*. Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Too often, just like some in the New Testament, our **focus** is on an earthly kingdom. We want to make Jesus our earthly King. We demand a successful earthly ministry, when He repeatedly tells us that His Kingdom is not of this world. With the above passages in mind, I would challenge you to **focus** your thoughts on Christ - **focus** your eyes on Jesus - and **focus** on *going* instead of *growing*. According to the Bible, by **focusing** completely on Christ, you *will* have a completely

triumphant, victorious, successful ministry, that *will* be creating, sustaining and strengthening faith instead of manipulating or trying to control others.

God has given us common sense and I am very thankful for the many laypeople who are able to offer suggestions for various organizational aspects within the church. However, when those suggestions turn into demands and commands and start tearing apart the church, something is drastically wrong. When the **focus** goes from Christ and Him crucified, to someone's opinion about what should and should not be done (my business principles are better than your business principles, my program is better than your program; my pew is better than your pew; my pastor is more anointed than your pastor; my idea or suggestion is better than yours, my building is prettier than your building), and pastors are literally abused and lose their positions and churches are destroyed because of a **focus** on earthly things, then many Christians the world over need to repent and turn back to a **focus** on Christ.

To have a **focus** on Christ also means to have a **focus** on love instead of earthly knowledge. The sinful desire to put earthly knowledge above love and obedience to God started in the Garden of Eden. It says in Genesis 2:9, 16-17, "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" Adam and Eve were severely punished for their aberrant love of earthly knowledge, because it was idolatry. They wanted to "be like God." How often are we idolatrous in our desire to play God in our everyday dealings with others? In Proverbs 9:10 it says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

How much time do you spend trying to grow in the knowledge of this world, compared to the time you spend growing in the knowledge of the Holy One? Do you have a lot of worldly wisdom? Proverbs 12:23 tells us, "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly." Proverbs 17:27 reminds us, "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered." There can be an errant combination of knowledge and zealotry, that is not based on Christ and His holiness. St. Paul talks about this in Romans 10:1-3, where he says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the

Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." There is a profusion of zealous churches and people in the world, but how many of them are zealous about the righteousness that comes from God? When you are sharing knowledge what is your **focus**? Is it Christ or yourself? Are you zealous to push your own views, thoughts and agendas or Christ?

For instance, in one report from a home mission board committee, it was interesting to see the wording that was used. It was sprinkled with phrases such as, "What a blessing the Church Extension Fund is to our mission congregations." "Pastors are conducting ethnographic interviews, meeting with prospects, and developing outreach plans." "We are seeking a Conditional Use Permit." "We rejoice that they received mission status and facility planning authority." "An every member visit by the pastor and members is planned this fall to explain the importance of mission status." "Educating new prospects; Integrating new members." "Work While it is Day Stewardship Program is in full swing." "They are developing plans to build a multipurpose facility." "They are offering blended worship services." "They use PowerPoint in their worship services." "He is starting small group Bible studies and working on teen and children's ministry programs." "The congregation is focusing on training Christians and leaders for ministry." "They are planning a mass mailing using Outreach Marketing materials." "30 people recently attended a ministry planning session." "They are promoting their church through the Chamber of Commerce." "They are looking for input to enhance their music, including the use of MIDI." "They are investigating a Christian support group for recovering alcoholics." "They are doing a feasibility study." "Here are some of the key thrusts: Hold meetings with missions and missionaries to help them organize their missions well, and plan for ministry, develop financial plans and projections, manage their financial affairs, and work toward self support." "Develop a plan to better research potential new fields before a missionary is even sent in." Even with close scrutiny you probably could not find anything wrong or sinful with any of these particular ideas. However, the question still remains, what is the **focus**? Where does your mind wander when you are reading little snippets like this? Is it Christ and Him crucified or is it plans, integrating, programs, marketing, promoting, enhancing, feasibility studies, projections

and organization? Does everyone who reads such a report go away edified and rejoicing in Christ or do some go away feeling guilty or depressed because they do not think they are enhancing their music with MIDI (Could that be like gas stations putting on their gas pumps “Enhanced with Ethanol”? Personally, I do not want such enhancements in my gasoline!) or doing enough feasibility studies (Isn’t it always feasible to proclaim the Gospel?) or focusing on training or doing outreach marketing (Where should the **focus** be?); Whether it is intentional or not, and putting the best construction on everything it probably is not intentional, such subtleties do not go unnoticed and in some cases an improper **focus** has done irreparable damage to sincere and Godly Christians and churches who seek to **focus** on Christ.

When we **focus** on earthly things, where is the humility? Could it be that the smartest people are actually the most humble? If you look at most of the problems that churches are facing today, could it be that most of them are related to a lack of humility? Could we avoid a whole lot of problems by emptying ourselves of self and filling ourselves with the love of Christ? Is it possible to be humble enough to question whether our **focus** is on “grow” or “go” - Christ or man - the Gospel or an earthly “ministry”?

1 Corinthians 1:5 says, “For in Him [Christ] you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge.” We are enriched through the knowledge of Christ. You can be a totally sophisticated genius, but if you are not sharing knowledge centered on the love of Christ, you are nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2 reminds us, “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 sums it up beautifully, when it says, “We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.” Where is your **focus**? Is it on Christ, His holiness, His righteousness and His love? Are you being zealous for Christ, based on His holiness, righteousness and love or is it based on your egotism, smugness and conceit? Are you seeking to enrich others through Christ or yourself?

For instance, I can remember a time when two different groups were setting up for two dissimilar events in the church sanctuary at the same time. We will call them Group A and Group B. Group A was moving things all over the place and making lots of noise. It appeared as if they were oblivious to Group B. Group B was quietly setting up their things, but some were obviously

annoyed with Group A. Neither group were being loving to the other. Instead of focusing on Christ and His love and mercy, some were saying things like, “Do they really need to be doing that right now?” “Are they going to hog the entire room?” “My event is more important than their event.” “We have been around a lot longer than they have.” “We were here first.” “Our program is more valuable than their program.” Where was the **focus**? Was it on Christ or their own self-interest? If you deal with the situation through a **focus** on Christ, you must conclude that neither group is more important. Christ is the crucial One. One group is not “better” than the other. Christ is the Holy One and focal point. A Christ centered solution would have been to put an abrupt halt to the back biting and help the others for Jesus’ sake. By putting Christ and His righteousness first, they could have refrained from grumbling, opened loving lines of communication, and all of the preparations could have been accomplished in a spirit of unity and love. Way too much precious time is wasted with petty squabbling and crabbiness when a simple Gospel solution is always as close as a **focus** on Christ and His love!

In Matthew 6:31-34 Jesus says, “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” My contention is that too many Christians are running around like pagans. They are seeking food, drink and clothes, or their pet programs, groups and artificial “ministries” and not seeking Christ and His kingdom and righteousness first. Too many Christians are worried about earthly things, when they should be **focused** on Christ and His Gospel.

I also firmly believe, that if the **focus** of your “ministry” is predominantly to transform or change another person – whether the change is good or bad – YOU are wrong. If your **focus** is not to reveal Christ’s love, based on an accurate recognition of the other person’s needs, you only succeed in being a manipulator, NOT a minister. I believe the **focus** in sharing Christ’s love, the Gospel, is to preserve the primary **focus** of ministering to others’ deepest needs and not trying to accomplish your own wishes, dreams, ideas and opinions. The Gospel is all about faith and faith is about love and love is about truly caring for someone’s soul. If you are not interested in faith, love or someone’s soul, you can create all kinds of artificial programs, groups and plans that give

the outward appearance that you are “doing” something, but the **focus** will always be wrong. The Gospel does not lead to shallow relationships and artificial “ministries.”

Please allow me to make this perfectly clear – although, my publication is a take off from Mr. Eberle’s article, this publication is not aimed at him or any particular person, church, denomination or synod. If you read his article and think it is the best thing since the personal computer, you are welcome to your opinion. If you can follow all of his “hard learned lessons” and still keep the **focus** on Christ and the Gospel, then God bless you. This publication is aimed at myself and every individual, church, denomination or synod that has ever changed the **focus** from Christ to earthly things. I am not “reacting” to his article at all. His article was simply an easy tool or take-off point for my publication. His article could have been written by anyone, using whatever principles they wanted. I still would have said what I did, because I had my own agenda and that was to reflect my personal experiences in the last nineteen years and **focus** on Christ. I definitely do not expect everyone to have shared the same experiences or necessarily feel the same frustrations I have. Although, I would pray we would all have the same **focus**. If you are going to respond by saying, “You are wrong about how you understood Mr. Eberle’s article,” you would be misunderstanding my intent and losing your focus. I purposely did not accurately follow the content or context or focus of his article, because it was not always relevant to what I wanted to say. If you want to follow Mr. Eberle’s, “14 Guidelines for the Pastor,” go right ahead – just do not force anyone else to do so. Always **focus** on Christ!

Before you get defensive about your beautiful building, brilliant ideas and precious programs, my point is that there is nothing wrong with making suggestions, giving insights, worshipping in a building, having padded pews, programs and groups, as long as the **focus** is on Christ and you are not being distracted from that one thing needful – faith in Christ. In general, 99 out of 100 people, are wonderful, supportive, loving, sweet and gentle. However, I personally, and many pastors that I know personally, have been and continue to be hurt deeply by a small handful of insensitive, unloving, arrogant, selfish, rude, mean-spirited people who have lost the **focus** on Christ. Instead of lovingly making suggestions, they make demands, criticisms and condemnations, based on their own self-centered opinions. I do not expect you to feel sorry for me or anyone else, but if this moves anyone to repentance and back to a **focus** on Christ, His love and mercy and the Gospel, that would be great. If not, I am still comforted by the fact that

Christ died for me, nothing can separate me from God's love and heaven is my home. I can sleep easy at night, knowing that God is truly in control. My **focus** is on Christ and He is my eternal peace. That does not stop me from praying at times like Christ pouring out His heart in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if it be Your will, take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Your will be done."

In Luke 10:38-42 it says, "As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." There is nothing wrong with preparations, however, I submit to you, that too many churches today are distracted by all the preparations, are screaming at God and their pastors to help out with all the work, and God is telling us to quit being so worried and upset about so many things and concentrate on Him and His Word.

In Acts 6:1-4 it says, "In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word." There is nothing wrong with distributing food, however, I submit to you, that too many Christians and churches today are neglecting the ministry of the Word of God in order to "wait on tables." God is telling us through His Word to call men full of the Spirit and wisdom to give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. That is impossible to do when the pastor is distracted by so many opinions, programs and odd jobs unrelated to Word and Sacrament.

God's grace and His Word are a much more powerful focus, motivator and unifier than any one individual's opinion, idea or dream. God's Word does not tell us which outreach method is better than others. He tells us to reach out. His Word does not tell us to form ladies groups, youth

groups, young adult groups, senior groups and so on. He says fellowship. He does not tell us what kind of carpeting to buy or even whether we should buy carpeting. He does not tell us what kind of lighting, sound equipment, pews or chairs, or give us any other specific details about building a church. He says, “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.”

Every Christian church and each individual Christian should keep their entire **focus** on Christ and the Gospel. As long as we are preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, we are doing God’s will. For the most part, it makes very little difference what form they take, unless you happen to be preaching in German in a church filled with people who only know Spanish. In Christian freedom, if you want to use the King James Version and not the New International Version it is not a sin. God will still love you, although, do not be surprised or angry if some people cannot understand what the KJV is saying and end up leaving.

God’s Word will always accomplish what God wants it to accomplish and to build a straw man to some how prove that your way, your method or your version of God’s Word is going to accomplish more of what God wants to accomplish is incongruous. God’s Word says, “preach.” In Romans 10:14-15 it says, “How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!’” The Bible does not give volume after volume about what makes a fabulous sermon, except to tell us it had better include the Good News. If people want to write volume after volume on what they think is a good sermon, that is their privilege. Just do not try to push it off as God’s Word and demand that your style, your homiletical principles, your particular application must be followed as Gospel truth. God’s Word says, “teach.” In Titus 2:1 it says, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” God’s Word does not give a multitude of commands about what constitutes marvelous teaching. It does say you **must** teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. If someone desires to print tome after tome about what makes the perfect teacher, that is their right. It is not your right to arrogantly assume that those same principles, methods, means or ways are right for everyone. Make a suggestion and leave the rest up to God. Do not build a huge straw man about how your principles are the best, the be all, end all and if someone does not follow your precious principles than they are stupid, idiotic, unsupportive or unloving. It is not unloving for different people to

use different methods. It is unloving to get angry at someone and ostracize, shun, snub and otherwise make someone's life miserable because they happen to disagree with you. If you disagree on sound doctrine, you have a problem. If you disagree on principles, methods, attitudes and opinions – so what?!? Love each other like Christ loves you.

A very good example is music. Personally, I do not like rap music. If I had to sit through a worship service that incorporated rap music it would make me ill. Does that mean rap music is sinful, evil or wicked? No. Does it mean rap music cannot be used to share the Gospel? No. It means one thing and one thing only. I prefer Joel Hanson and Sara Groves song, “*Traveling Light*” to any of John Reuben’s rap songs. So what?!? Do I hate you if you refuse to listen to Joel Hanson and Sara Groves? No. Do I hate you if you love to listen to John Reuben? No.

Where is the **focus**? My **focus** is on Christ and His love. In Christ, I am going to love you no matter what music you listen to, but do not be surprised if you come to my church and hear organ music playing hymns. If that makes you ill, in Christian freedom you are welcome and encouraged to listen to whatever style of music you want. You have every right in the world and I would be the first to give you a hug if you wanted to start the “First Christian Church Of Rap.” However, you would be wasting your time giving me a call to be the pastor. Conversely, do not write digest after digest about how your music is better than my music (Could it be that all Gospel focused music glorifies God?) – how your music appeals to more people (Is it possible that God wants the Gospel to be the appeal, not music?) – how your music converts more people (Only the Gospel converts.) – how your music edifies more people (Is it probable that only the Gospel edifies?) – how your music is more culturally relevant than my music (The Gospel is eternally relevant.) – how MIDI “enhances” the music (Could it be that the Gospel does not need any enhancing or that not everyone agrees that MIDI is an “enhancement”?) – how your music is more inspiring, more spirit filled, more enlightened (Perhaps only the Gospel is truly inspiring, Spirit filled and enlightened?) – how your music is more God pleasing (Could it be that the Gospel is God pleasing and everything else is icing on the cake?). Make use of whatever form, format or style of music you choose, but do not destroy your fellow Christian because of music. The Christian Church does not need music wars! Always ask, “Where is your **focus**?” Quit building up all kinds of self-centered, overconfident, foolhardy straw men that drive a wedge between people. Instead, work harder on constructing bridges, building relationships and loving

each other through the Gospel that is the eternal unifier. You can argue music preferences for all eternity. All Christians should be agreeing on Christ and the Gospel. Let us **focus** on Him.

The problems begin when we, like the Pharisees, begin to fill in the blanks with our own arrogance, pride and conceit. In general, most people are quite sweet, humble and gentle about giving suggestions and offering different ideas. I praise God for them. However, more and more so-called “experts” are writing books and articles, having seminars and workshops, making videos and tapes and pushing their “expertise” as the only way to “grow” a church or preach or teach or administer the Sacraments. Business principles, psychological ideology, logic, marketing techniques, surveys, statistics, manipulation and earthly wisdom is replacing the Gospel, love, common sense, unity, humility, joy, peace and God’s grace. Too many church members are destroying pastors, churches and each other with their self-centered, earthly oriented focus. Too many churches are competing against churches and some are even competing against big and small corporations, based on earthly principles and earthly riches and earthly resources and they are finding that they are actually competing with the devil and losing. As the god of this world, the devil has far more worldly resources at his disposal than we do and when we replace Christ with business principles, marketing techniques, entertainment and other things that appeal to our human flesh, the devil is always going to win. God never intended for the Church to compete with the business sector or amongst various churches. You will never find in the Bible, “**The Church With The Best And Most Ministries Wins.**” Christ’s Church has something the devil does not and that is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. My contention is that it is essential that we turn to Him and put our **entire focus** on Him, before the world cannot tell the difference between a church and a corporation and more importantly, before more pastors, churches and fellow Christians are destroyed.

I apologize ahead of time if you are looking for some kind of half baked, shallow, angry, knee jerk reaction to Eberle’s article. Please rest assured that I did not write an entire book of reflections just to spout off in rage. I wrote this to comfort myself and any other pastor who has been barraged by “14 Guidelines for the Pastor.” I wrote this to put the **focus** back on Christ and the Gospel. I wrote this to move people to repentance. People have been abusing pastors for much too long. If you are here looking for a rebuttal, or study, or response, or refutation, or review, or analysis of Mr. Eberle’s article you will be disappointed. This is not a personal attack.

I do not believe Mr. Eberle and I have ever met, so I can honestly say I know nothing about him, except what he has chosen to place in print. In fact, I truly am thankful that he wrote his article, because it really was the perfect venue to put into publication what I have been experiencing and thinking for a long time. If you feel the need to read his article – go ahead. You might even be blessed, if you are looking for business principles to run your church. Just do not go and shove them down your pastor’s throat as God’s final answer to every problem that ever existed in the church. Instead, go and comfort your pastor with the grace, mercy, love and forgiveness of Christ.

A Paradigm Shift is not meant to be a theologically definitive doctrinal statement of any kind. In fact, I purposely followed a format of “perhaps” this and “perhaps” that straw man, provocative, tongue in cheek, sometimes satirical questions and intimations, not to be rancorous or sarcastic, but to show you that I completely understand what is at stake and am entirely seriously about my **focus**. The Gospel, unity, harmony, peace and contentment are all lost when you **focus** on something other than Christ. I set up lots and lots of straw men and asked pointed questions, so you could clearly see the utter negativity of **focusing** on the Law, opinions, suggestions and worldly principles. For every idea, proposal, offer and plan that exists, there are a thousand more to replace them. Some are just as good, valid, useful and God pleasing as all the rest. Feel free to lovingly pick one or even several to use, but do not beat someone over the head if they reject your brainchild. Do not go on the rampage against the pastor if he does not preach, teach or administer the Sacraments exactly the way you want him to. Do not selfishly throw a temper tantrum if you do not get your own way. Do not cry yourself to sleep if your particular dream fails or never sees the light of day. Live by grace, mercy and Christ’s love in all you do. Remember God is the One who is in control.

I can very clearly remember the day when at least six different people came into my office with six very different suggestions. For instance: “Your sermons are too short.” “Your sermons are too long.” “Your sermons are too legalistic.” “Your sermons are too Gospel oriented.” “Your sermons are too loud.” “Your sermons are too quiet.” Which “suggestion” am I supposed to take? If I choose one over the other, the other five people are going to be up in arms and gossip behind my back about what a rotten preacher I am. I could try to be all things to all people and end up not pleasing myself or anyone else, because it would be impossible. I could go to

“Toastmasters International” once a week to try to improve my skills, but possibly miss a hundred opportunities to share the Gospel and in the meantime get behind in preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, not to mention my visits, sermon writing and Bible studies. Or I could **focus** on Jesus Christ and His grace and mercy that covers me, do the best job of preaching I know how and leave the results up to God. Six people may end up being disappointed, but God certainly is not disappointed. He promises that His Word will always brings results. If one of the six “suggestions” happen to be legitimate, in my Christian freedom, I might even take the time to turn up the microphone or shorten the sermon. But it would not be a sin if I did not change a thing, as long as the **focus** of my sermon was on Christ and the Gospel and I was communicating that Gospel clearly. This goes for every aspect of the ministry. In Christian freedom, I *could* go to a myriad of seminars on lighting, music, sound systems, how to make the perfect pew, discipline, teaching, preaching, Bible study writing, what clothes to wear, what car to drive, every medical advancement known to man, how to use a computer, how to make a web page, how to play the piano, how to fix a furnace or any of a million others. However, you cannot find anything in the Bible that says it would be a sin if I did not go to any of them and **focused** on Christ and His precious Word every day. Time spent in God’s Word is never wasted. Can you say the same for other time?

When some FBI agents are hired they are given intensive training in spotting counterfeit money. What is interesting, is that they make a very thorough study of the genuine bills – not the fakes – so that they can spot the counterfeit currency immediately because of its difference to the real thing.

What is my point? We can waste so much time with the counterfeit, that we can get to the point where we cannot tell the difference between it and the real thing. While it might be helpful to study false religions, business principles, methods and means, we should be so familiar with God’s Word and the voice of Christ that whenever we encounter error, we will spot it at once. Too many today are being led astray by cults, ideas, suggestions and programs because they do not recognize how they are being deceived. The only way to prevent this is to **focus** completely on Jesus Christ and His precious Gospel. A thorough knowledge of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, is the only clear way to detect the counterfeits.

I wrote this because of many years of being bombarded by so-called, well meaning Christians who think they are doing pastors a favor by sharing their favorite pet schemes. I pray that they would not take it personally if I do not follow every single suggestion given to me. I wrote this to publicly share some of the frustrations I and others have faced as pastors, as day after day, members of various congregations bring request after request, opinion after opinion, suggestion after suggestion, some so bogus and absurd that they boggle the imagination. I pray that they be a little more realistic about their thoughts and ideas and recognize that no one can possibly follow everything everyone says. I wrote this for all the hateful, mean, ornery, spiteful people who have at times made life for me and my fellow pastors a living hell. I pray that it moves them to repentance. I wrote this for all the pastors who have been booted out of the ministry for idiotic, petty reasons. I pray that they are comforted by the **focus** on Christ. I wrote it for the pastors who are being spiritually raped and blamed for it. I pray that they feel vindicated by the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin. I wrote it for all my fellow, suffering servants, who are sick and tired of the onslaught of information overload. I pray that the **focus** on Christ would lighten their load. May we all lay our burdens down and travel light in Christ's freedom, instead of laying more and more burdens on others!

I openly and humbly apologize ahead of time for any inaccurate statements, false doctrine, offensive statements or lies. They were unintentional. In my heart of hearts I wrote this with great joy, in order to lift high the cross of Jesus Christ to His glory. Please do not believe for a second that I think every single church, pastor and/or layperson is insidiously evil or hell bent on destroying the pastor. 99 times out of 100 the lay people I have known have been a tremendous blessing. Please do not believe for an instant that I think every program, group, suggestion or principle is wrong or ludicrous. Life would be pretty chaotic without some sort of structure. However, it becomes horribly anarchic and dismal when a handful of people insist that their way is the only way. Our **focus** should always be on Christ. He is the **ONLY** way!

In my self-fulfilling prophecy type of way, I rather doubt this publication will have a great deal of affect on the world, but it made me feel better. I finally had an opportunity to say what I have been wanting to say for a long time and I am grateful for the opportunity. This is meant to be like members, who walk into the pastor's office, spew out their list of complaints and walk out without ever giving them a chance to respond. Do not be surprised if you write me and I do not

respond. It is nothing personal. I am just too busy preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments in my own simple way. If there is anything blatantly heretical I humbly repent and take it back. Rest assured, that I did not write this in anger, hate or bitterness, but only in catharsis. In fact, like St. Paul says in Philippians 4:11-13, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

Solo Deo Gloria!

Introduction

I sincerely thank Mr. Bruce Eberle, for his article in “Charis” magazine, from Wisconsin Lutheran College, (Summer 2002, Volume 2, Number 1), entitled, “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective.” Finally, someone has put down in print, exactly what I have been experiencing for over 20 years. It was concise, accurate and extensive – just the kind of information I needed to read to motivate me to write this publication. I also thank him for inviting me to comment on his article. Please allow me to explain.

There once was a pastor who was baptized and confirmed in a conservative Lutheran church. His home pastor was a conservative pastor who still wore a black Geneva gown and believed strongly in a Christ-centered, Word and Sacrament ministry. He would preach, teach and administer the Sacraments and when he was not doing that he would make visits on members and non-members. He did not focus on programs, silly gimmicks, marketing techniques, business principles, did not even support the Sunday School much, hand picked all the church officers and pretty much ran the church single-handedly. When he retired, after spending over 25 years at the same church, the congregation had about 800 members – more than the population of the town it was in.

Myself on the other hand, after graduating from seminary, I went to back to a summer class on Church Growth, being taught by the leading Church Growth guru in the denomination at the time. I learned all kinds of helpful hints on how to grow the church, using popular and proven

methods of psychology, marketing and business. I made up an awesome list of what my congregation was supposedly doing wrong and what they needed to change to make things just perfect. I had wonderful, common sense ideas, like make sure you have a parking lot big enough for everyone to park in, be nice to visitors and greet them cheerfully and have small group Bible studies in homes. I thought with my new leadership skills everything was going to be great! It was not. When I returned and presented my cannot fail “list,” based on all the right, good, tried and true, cannot go wrong, scientifically accurate principles, that were given to me by the greatest experts in the field, who assured me they were sure fire winner suggestions – the leaders in the congregation got extremely angry. My rules were not their rules. My vision was not their vision. Their Country Club, exclusive church was suddenly becoming too demanding and might start bringing in the wrong kind of people and actually require some work on their part. I was suddenly the enemy, to be destroyed at all costs. Things deteriorated rapidly. Those of you who have gone through this know what I mean.

To give you an idea of some of the things that began to happen, consider the following. One leader started spying on my house and keeping records of when I came and went. They kept records of every phone call I made from the church. They started rumors and lies about how I lived my life. They publicly scrutinized and judged just about every aspect of my life and when they still could not find anything damning enough, they came up with a special document and called it, “14 Guidelines for the Pastor.” It included things like: Wear a pastoral collar. Make lots of visits. Be waiting at the church door when parents drop off and pick up their children from the pre-school. Write all your own Bible studies. Do not use the hymnal liturgies – instead make up your own every Sunday. Never use boring hymns – only hymns we like. There were others, but the theme was basically the same – play by man’s rules, not God’s. They made it sufficiently impossible to follow, so that he was sure to fail. What is my point in mentioning all these? How often do other Christians make up their own version of the “14 Guidelines” and force them onto pastors? Could it be way too often?

At one point during this time, I received a divine call to a church, where I was being asked to serve with a female pastor, by the name of Louise, who had a rather active clown ministry. It was quite clear in the call documents and in talking with the members, that the philosophy of this

congregation was, “Our emphasis is not on God’s Word, it is on entertaining and people pleasing. We will do anything to draw people in, including having a woman, clown minister.”

This same attitude became abundantly clear at my own church, when they were holding a congregational meeting and a theological issue came up. One of the antagonistic church leaders stood up, pounded his fist on the table and said, “I do not give a damn what God’s Word says, we are doing things my way.” Many of the members of that church were wonderful people, but that statement pretty much summed up the two and half years of my ministry there with that cliquish, divisive leadership.

It was also getting dangerously close to being the prevailing attitude (not doctrine) of the denominational seminaries and within the individual churches in general. Church Growth was the current byword and the popular attitude that permeated pretty much every periodical sent out by the synod. The seminary even endorsed Church Growth principles in a resolution to the synod convention at one time. The emphasis on preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments was rapidly being replaced by marketing techniques, business acumen and salesmanship and I was getting caught up in it. Some kind of personal change was necessary. It was time to **focus** on Christ and I made it my life long goal to do so.

In the summer of 2002, an article came out, that was published in *Charis* magazine, from Wisconsin Lutheran College, (Summer 2002, Volume 2, Number 1) by Mr. Bruce Eberle, entitled, “*Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective.*”

Ultimately, that is why this publication was written. From some people’s perspective, they have made it very clear that the pastor is no longer the Shepherd of the flock, whose **focus** is on Christ, preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments. According to their perspective, the pastor should now be a marketing expert, a salesman, an expert leader, a veritable hired hand. Some are condescendingly insistent that, “It is my way or the highway.” Some say if the pastor is not an effective leader, based on their, “14 guidelines for the Pastor,” then 99 times out of 100, if a church is not growing, then “pastors have no one to blame but themselves.” Some say, “I hope that by sharing my experiences and observations, pastors can be more confident and effective in leading their parishes and winning lost souls for eternity.” And some say, “Virtually every pastor

can increase his effectiveness by reading, studying, listening, and taking courses that help him understand how to lead.”

Do you know that everything Jesus said was important? In Matthew 23:23 He said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” Do you see the **focus** here? It is on justice, mercy and faithfulness – they are all found in the Gospel. How many pastors do you think are now more confident and effective in winning lost souls for eternity because of these or any “14 guidelines for the Pastor”? How much more effective is the Gospel in winning souls for eternity, because pastors are reading, studying, listening and taking courses in leadership?

What do some people say are their qualifications for expertise? Are they theologians? Are they Bible experts? Did God give them a special revelation? No. None of the above. They say they are successful businessmen. They say they let success go straight to their head, are arrogant and proud and ended up losing \$2,000,000.00 dollars, then read Tom Peters books on “Excellence” and rebuilt the “Whatever Communications Group” into “one of the most successful and most prosperous fund raising organizations of its kind.” What are some of their “experiences and observations” that are going to “make pastors more confident and effective in leading their parishes and winning lost souls for eternity?” What do they offer by way of “carrying out the Great Commission?” Is it solid Biblical principles? Is it confidence in God’s effective Word? Is it reliance on God after assuring us that God is, “everything and I am nothing.” Is it based on Deuteronomy 8, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.’” No. None of the above. They say they have learned “hard lessons” that “are just as applicable to the parish ministry as they are to running your business.” They give us, “14 Guidelines for the Pastor” such as:

1. Give all glory to God.
2. Do not deny reality.
3. Do not rationalize failure.
4. The buck stops here.

5. Get out of the way.
6. Care about your team.
7. Be a cheerleader.
8. Be a risk taker.
9. Set goals. Devise a plan. Measure results.
10. Have a great vision. Dream big dreams.
11. Communicate Clearly.
12. Add members. Keep them.
13. Insist on accountability.
14. Leadership. It is a journey, not a destination.

My contention in this publication, is that people who **focus** on business principles within the context of the church are wrong, not because their principles are not applicable to the business world, but because of their **focus**. I personally do not believe the Church should be run like a business – it should be run like a Church. If the Gospel does not even require a building, why should we make the building, the programs or our opinions be the **focus** of our ministry? Too often we are seeing an increasingly destructive, divisive, theological pastor destroying and not so subtle shift in direction, away from Gospel centered, Christ centered, Word and Sacrament, preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments ministry. For many, the focus is now law based, human wisdom based, business principles, leadership and communication tools and God expects results ministry. This man-centered, earthly centered, focus on preparations and programs and principles, did not sneak in by way of false doctrine or official statements by any particular church body or synod. This hateful, mean-spirited, pastor destroying philosophy barged its way in by way of private opinions, surveys, expert advice, seminars, workshops, videos, books, magazines, tapes and any other way people could push their personal agendas and push their Godly pastors out of the way in favor of their own arrogance.

The Way It Was...

Whether one reads the Old Testament or the New Testament there is never a “business” approach to the ministry. Ministry, from the beginning of time, has been and always will be a Law and Gospel ministry. It is based on a loving relationship with God. It is being part of God’s family. It started with God’s relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where He walked and talked with them on a regular basis. It continued through the relationship God had with His people in the Old Testament, as shown through the moral law, ceremonial law and civil law. It manifested itself in Jesus Christ, as He built relationships with His disciples and apostles

and showed His perfect obedience by suffering and dying on the cross. It poured itself out, when Jesus shed His blood on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins. Ministry is about that loving relationship we have with God and the perfect obedience, suffering and death of Christ on the cross and the forgiveness we receive through His mercy. Jesus was the Son of a carpenter and the Son of God, not a business major at a key university. True Gospel and Christ centered ministry has never been and never should be based on man's wisdom or business principles. How can you build intimate, loving relationships based on artificial programs?

What is the ministry about? Jesus says in Matthew 10:37-38, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me." In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 St. Paul says, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

The ministry is not all about leadership and communication tools and God expecting results, it is about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Pastors all over the world are depressed, under a huge amount of stress, literally being destroyed physically and emotionally, shoved out of the ministry, driven to poverty, shunned, ridiculed and tormented by a philosophy of ministry that is based on something other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They are between the rock of synods, large church administrations and organized politics and the hard place of Christians and congregations who are demanding what should not be demanded – worldly gain, growth, success, numbers, programs, suggestions, ideas, opinions – and overlooking what should not be overlooked – faithfulness to God's Word.

People the world over can talk about how we can glean golden nuggets from the wisdom of the business world, teaching industry, marketing trade or other worldly endeavors. Everyone can talk until they are cyanotic about the common sense of using marketing principles, disciplinary ideology or vital music enhanced with MIDI within the church. Christians everywhere can extol the virtues of success based on personal achievement. Pastor after pastor can attend Fuller

Theological Seminary or any other Church Growth school to collect tidbits of man-made wisdom and knowledge. Administrators can spend weeks in seminars accumulating pages of data. Experts can be called in, surveys taken, tomes written extolling the virtues of our own beating drums. But in the meantime, how many pastors bury their heads in their pillows and cry themselves to sleep, because Word and Sacrament ministry is being replaced with business principles, marketing techniques and administrative tasks? How many times have their theological skills either become unnecessary or secondary to the new and improved marketing mission at hand. Too many pastors are now considered hired hands, paid to do the bidding of those business elite who know far more about winning friends and influencing enemies, based on man's wisdom, not God's Word. Many, many pastors who are fat, ugly, out of touch, dress funny, supposedly read the Bible too much, have a physical illness or blemish of any kind are treated with disrespect and senselessly tormented. Pastors who are known for their theological expertise are often times criticized for being over people's heads or irrelevant. How is Christ being glorified and the Gospel getting the **focus** with that kind of denigration?

I have seen dozens of pastors, many of them good friends, leaving the ministry in utter pain. What was their great sin? They did not play by the rules. They did not grow the mega-church. They faithfully followed after the Scriptures and Christ's command to "Go," honestly thinking and believing that God's Word is sufficient, only to be told in no uncertain terms, from laymen and fellow pastors alike, that they needed more. They needed people skills, leadership skills, counseling skills, business skills, accounting skills, building skills, marketing skills and any other skill that someone in their not so humble opinion thought was necessary to accomplish their pet goals for the day. May God have mercy on the pastor who gets in the way of some powerful, arrogant member or church official who wants to control the church and rule the roost with their own conceited or heretical beliefs.

Ask yourself the question, "Is my church and pastor truly and completely dedicated to Jesus Christ and Him crucified or do they just give lip service to the Gospel and instead rely on man's wisdom?" Do they spend more time in God's Word or doing administrative tasks? Is their emphasis on Christ and His precious Word or programs, enhanced music, groups, entertainment, fund raisers, building projects and a myriad of other distractions? If the focus is not on Christ, sit

down and discuss it with your pastor and find out why. If things do not change, then leave and go somewhere else where the focus is on Christ.

There are plenty of excellent books written on the subject of the public ministry, from a Biblical, Law and Gospel, Word and Sacrament perspective. Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard and even C.F.W. Walther had a lot of great things to say about the public ministry and its total focus on Christ and God's Word. When was the last time you read Chemnitz' *Enchiridion*, Gerhard's *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Luther's *Sermons* or Walther's *Law and Gospel* compared to the last time you read a novel or self-help book or marketing or business book that talked about the ministry, but was devoid of any real power? When was the last time you read a Biblically solid, theological book, compared to the last time you went to a seminar, workshop, watched a video, listened to a tape or sat at the feet of a heretic to learn from their great and worldly wisdom?

In 2 Timothy 3:1-4 St. Paul warns, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

There are mega-churches popping up all over the world. They definitely have a form of godliness. People get together and say they are worshipping God. They have built giant and gorgeous buildings, with all the modern amenities, where people can sing and dance and have fun. They have successfully used every business technique and marketing skill possible to win the masses and entertain millions. Hollywood and the entertainment industry are making millions off from Christians. But who is getting served? God or the flesh? Where is the power? Is it ministry or manipulation?

The Bible says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." God tells us to have nothing to do with those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power. What do so many do instead? They buy the books, buy the tapes, buy the CD's, buy the videos, buy the DVD's, watch the shows, listen to the radio programs, go to the seminars and pray to God that they can be just as blessed and successful as the other guy. They want to build an earthly kingdom for Christ. What is driving much of this

“form of godliness”? Could it be greed, money, power, pride, the sinful flesh and the desire for success for success’ sake – anything but the Gospel? How many of those “successful” mega-churches or ministries have truly Biblical theologians who thoroughly know Greek and Hebrew? How many of them have pastors who have spent eight demanding years studying God’s Word? How many of them actually care about God’s Word at all? How many of them give the Bible lip service, but do not care about the true power behind God’s Word, as opposed to their own success? Just how long would they be popular or how happy would they be if they ended up like poor Lazarus with the dogs licking his wounds? Would they still consider themselves blessed by God if they had a smaller church? Do you consider yourself blessed by God if your church is big and powerful and gloriously wonderful, filled with all kinds of programs and activities? Or would you be satisfied with a church that has a simple, yet wonderfully Godly Word and Sacrament ministry – based on the power of the Gospel and not man? Is true success being a child of God and heir of eternal life or having a huge church?

When was the last time you attended a church that only offered a worship service, the Sacraments and a Bible study? Or have you grown to expect and even demand “ministry” to the poor, the drunkards, the drug addicts, the single parent, the gay, the cancer survivor and the divorced, not to mention the clown, puppet, infant, youth, young adult, middle adult, old adult, senior citizen and every other “ministry” in-between? Why is the pastor of the small church looked down upon so often, while the pastor of the big church slapped on the back for being a great success? Where does it say in the Bible that the mega-church is better than a small church? Where does it say in the Bible that there is ever success in numbers?

The theology of glory or success is a powerful pull for our sinful flesh. We all want success, glory, power and control. But the ministry of the Gospel is not about anything earthly or numerical. God is not about results, except for the results of His Word being proclaimed that will never come back empty, and that is His work not ours. God is about suffering, death, forgiveness, the power of the Gospel and eternal life. Ministry is all about the success of Jesus Christ and His victory over sin, death, satan and hell. It is about putting on the full armor of God and doing battle against the powers of darkness. It is about the power of God’s Word.

God said do not add or subtract anything from His Word. Focusing on marketing and business principle ministry can do both. It can steal the power and glory away from God and subtract from

His Word and can add the so called wisdom of man, based on “hard lessons learned.” Changing the **focus** away from God’s Word is empty, devoid, lacking of any power whatsoever, much less God’s power.

The Lutheran Confessions

How do the Lutheran Confessions address the issue? Even a cursory reading of the Book of Concord will reveal an understanding of the pastoral ministry as a preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments divinely appointed office. There is never any mention of the pastor as a marketing expert, salesman or business expert. Is that accidental? Is that just because of the culture? Is it because of the agrarian society? Not at all.

The Book of Concord, in the “*Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*,” under the section on “*The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops*,” says, “For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers. This right is a gift given exclusively to the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church. It is as Paul testifies to the Ephesians when he says, “When He ascended on high He gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8, 11, 12). He enumerates pastors and teachers among the gifts belonging exclusively to the church, and he adds that they are given for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ.”

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII, *The Number and Use of the Sacraments*, it says, “Thus priests are not called to make sacrifices that merit forgiveness of sins for the people, as in the Old Testament, but they are called to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to the people.”

In the Augsburg Confession, *Articles of Faith and Doctrine*, Article XIV, *Order in the Church*, it says, “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the Sacraments in the church without a regular call.”

How should all of this be understood in the light of this publication? According to the Lutheran Confessions, the work of the church and the minister is to administer the Gospel, not run a marketing campaign. The call into the public ministry is a call to publicly teach, preach and administer the Sacraments, not play salesman or business genius.

Martin Luther and other pastors during his time had many of the same problems we face today. There were plenty of people in their day, who wanted to build giant edifices to the glory of man, instead of building and strengthening faith and God's church through the Word of God. Cathedrals, basilicas and temples were sprouting up in many places throughout Europe. One could easily say, "They only wanted to build a church to the glory of God and there is nothing wrong with building a beautiful church." But how long does that kind of attitude really last? How long does it take before people start to worship the building and tear down the pastor and the congregation? How long before the focus turns from Word and Sacrament to money and building projects? How long before you start hearing, "We have nothing for the youth, nothing for the elderly, nothing for the single parent, nothing..."

Are you saying we do not have everything we need and more, contained in God's Word, contained within the worship service, contained in Bible studies? You might think you are well meaning when you say, "Wouldn't it be nice if we had special interest groups, support clusters, focus encounters, mission statements, short and long term planning." However, as many pastors have come to realize, that kind of well meaning thinking does not stop there.

It very quickly turns into, "Pastor, we *will* have special interest groups, support clusters, focus encounters, mission statements, short and long term planning and you will like it. Not only that, but we are not going to give you a vote in elders, council or voters meetings. On top of that, you are going to be our "yes man." You will preach, teach and administer the Sacrament while putting on a big smile and letting us run the show. But rest assured that we will tell you when you are not preaching, teaching or administering the Sacraments according to our specifications. In fact, be advised that we will make your life a living hell if you do anything that remotely looks like non-compliance to our superior wisdom and business expertise."

What about Luther?

Luther put it into clear perspective when he said, "To support or protect a poor, pious pastor is an act that makes no show and looks like a small thing. But to build a marble church, to give it golden ornaments, and to serve dead stone and wood—that makes a show that glitters! That is a virtue worthy of a king or prince! Well, let it make its show! Let it glitter! Meanwhile my pastor, who does not glitter, is practicing the virtue that increases God's kingdom, fills heaven with

saints, plunders hell, robs the devil, wards off death, represses sin, instructs and comforts every man in the world according to his station in life, preserves peace and unity, raises fine young folk, and plants all kinds of virtue in the people. In a word, he is making a new world! He builds not a poor, temporary house, but an eternal and beautiful Paradise, in which God Himself is glad to dwell. A pious prince or lord who supports or protects such a pastor can have a part in all this. Indeed, this whole work and all the fruits of it are his, as though he had done it all himself, because without his protection and support the pastor could not abide. Therefore no mountain of gold or silver in a land can be compared with this treasure. But blessed must be the eyes that can know this, and blessed the fists that can do it!”

What is happening in the modern, contemporary, enlightened, open minded, man’s wisdom centered churches of today? Are we building edifices and programs and congregations to the glory of man and tearing down pastors and Word and Sacrament ministry or are we completely supporting our pastors and the Gospel? Do you honestly think for one minute that pushing your business oriented agenda is supporting our pastors, or making confident, effective pastors? Please think again. Too many pastors are being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down by laymen and fellow pastors alike, who are forcing their hard earned lessons onto the pastor who is faithful to God’s Word.

When I left the LCMS in 1988, approximately 100 pastors either called or wrote to me, lamenting the state of the church today. What were their complaints? Almost to a man, they said something like, “The people are killing us with work, work and more work that is unrelated to the Word and Sacraments. The business agenda is taking over the church.”

I have known some great pastors, who were solid, Biblical scholars, Christ centered, Word and Sacrament type of pastors. How many of them are still in the ministry today? Were some tossed out or quit because of negligence to their duties, immoral living or false doctrine? No. They were forced out, by congregations and a synod that kept insisting that there must be something more than just God’s Word. Tongues wagged and heads hung in sadness, as the people lamented, “It is too bad that pastor was so inflexible, not a people person, stuck in his ivory tower, too radical, too unloving, too theological, too radically Biblical.” Translated that means, “It is too bad that pastor would not bow to all of our ideas, do our bidding, come to all the meetings, make all the

plans, listen to all our suggestions, be all things to all people, see the wisdom in business oriented ministry, be a great leader, be open minded to our personal opinions.”

Martin Luther and others were not ignorant of outside influences and other distractions that take away from the importance of the Word. At one point Luther said, “Remember, Israel, because very great and repeated danger follows upon forgetfulness of grace. Satan will more easily put up with all other articles than this one concerning the forgiveness of sins. So it happened and is happening to us to this day on the part of the Enthusiasts, who desire to keep us busy with other questions so that we may forget this article. So it happened to the early church, which became involved with other issues and external concerns and forgot this article. The Christian, however, always casts off from himself the most holy causes, as Christ did when He said (Matt. 12:48): “Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?” and (Luke 12:14): “Man, who made Me a judge or divider over you?” Thus it came about that through dangers and cares they forgot this article, and this was particularly true of the Roman Church. It is an exceedingly dangerous matter to live in this world and cling to God. You, therefore, who will soon be parish pastors, cling earnestly to the chief matter and let the rest go as much as you can. If you will with all zeal achieve the principal matters, you will also have disciples who will snore and belch enough. In this way satan tries to make his way into our hearts, not through evil things but through the very best, whereby he aims at drawing you and me too away from the Word. Remember Me, that is, openly proclaim and recall My preaching. That is to say, you, faithful people and preachers, take care to hold fast the Word as a lamp and a star, because dangers and affairs will weigh down on you and make you forget Me, just as it happened to the man who said, ‘I have married a wife’ (Luke 14:20). Do not be swamped by other matters and forget Me, but ‘be urgent in season and out of season’” (2 Tim. 4:2).”

Again, what is happening in the so-called modern, up to date, relevant church of today? Are we being drawn away from the Word? Are we being drawn away through the very best man or satan has to offer? Are we getting swamped by other matters and forgetting Jesus?

Did Luther ever bother himself with business procedures? Yes he did. But only in the light of Scriptures, making them subservient to Scriptures and not the other way around. For instance, in his article on “*Trade and Usury*” of 1524 he demonstrated that he knew quite a bit about the

business world, but in my reading of Luther I never once read where he rebuked a pastor for not being an astute business man.

In Luther's treatise on "*Trade and Usury*", the editor commented, "It is important to remember in evaluating Luther's statements in this treatise that his concern was religious in the first instance and only secondarily economic. His primary purpose was to instruct the Christian conscience, though the observations on and suggestions for the business procedures of his time are – if only a by-product – among the most significant that remain from that period. Luther distinguished clearly between the Law and the Gospel, and regarded himself as a servant of the Gospel. Though his formulations may appear largely medieval and reactionary to the superficial observer, his faith certainly shattered the bonds of the past, freeing the economy from the false ideal of sanctimonious poverty, the state from the bondage of ecclesiastically prescribed laws, and the church from a soul-stultifying preoccupation with legalistic casuistry. In short, Luther was not the reactionary that some have interpreted him to be when they emphasize his critique of the rebellious peasants; nor was he by any means the prophetic protagonist of modern capitalism. He was the theologian and pastor who laid upon the heart of Christian hearers the uncompromising demands of God, and upon the hearts of statesmen and merchants the practical necessity for unselfishly seeking the ends of equity for all men. His views of economics, while temporally conditioned, were Biblically determined, and must be seen in the light of his entire social ethics." To repeat, "Luther distinguished clearly between the Law and the Gospel, and regarded himself as a servant of the Gospel."

I think it is fair to say that most pastors would say they are "servants of the Gospel." However, if you were to make an audit of the time spent studying God's Word, preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, compared to time spent playing on the computer, going to marketing seminars, watching TV, doing administrative tasks, going to endless meetings, playing golf, going to fast food restaurants and worrying about whether or not they are an "effective" pastor, guess which one might win? I can guess, for the average pastor today, the time spent studying God's Word, preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments is minimal compared to all the other distractions of what people today call the "ministry."

Every so-called "expert" in the field thinks that their pet "ministry" is the most important, the most anointed, the most enlightened, the most superior, the most relevant. How many times have

you either listened to the radio or watched TV and heard the pious, sanctimonious words as they prayed to Jesus, “Lord, we just want to praise You, we just want to glorify You, we just want to thank You, we just want You to bless every aspect of *our* ‘ministry,’ we just want to truly believe that we are being active and busy and over-whelmed with work to do for You, we just want to show the world that we are the latest and greatest and up to date church.” And the “justs” go on for a very long time, just ignoring the power of the Gospel and just focusing on “just” what *they* are doing for God. A truly Gospel centered ministry is focused on what Christ has done for us, not what we do for God. The Bible talks very clearly about the Christian bearing fruit, but it never, ever gives glory to the fruit. It always gives glory to the God who made the fruit in the first place. Could it be that the modern, fashionable, present day church has just switched from worshipping God to just worshipping our fruity selves?

As St. Paul says in Romans 1:21-25, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.”

Too many churches around the world no longer glorify God, but claim their own wisdom to be superior to God’s and exchange the glory of the immortal God for marketing schemes, business plans, mission statements, short term and long term plans. They scream loudly, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail” – failing to recognize that God has not failed. Christ has been victorious. We have the unfailing Gospel. Sin, death, satan and hell have all been defeated. God does not need our help to be victorious. Too many churches have exchanged the truth of God, the Gospel of Christ, for a lie and now worship and serve the created things, the marketing schemes, the hard learned lessons, the business principles, rather than the Creator – who is forever praised.

Are you feeling guilty right now? If the shoe fits wear it. Do not get angry or defensive. Repent. Turn back to Christ and His mercy and forgiveness, reject the man centered wisdom, and **focus** completely on the Gospel and the only power that God has given us to do battle against the real enemy – the powers of darkness.

Your wise marketing skills, your fancy business principles, your common sense suggestions, your created things cannot even come close to fighting against the most powerful and evil enemy of all times. You are totally deluding yourself if you think for one second that you can be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power and struggle against and win against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms through anything this world has to offer. There is not one single temptation that you can avoid, defeat or conquer using business principles or marketing skills. Your business acumen means nothing on the death bed.

Let us briefly go back to some hard learned lessons and “14 Guidelines for the Pastor.” They are:

1. Give all glory to God.
2. Do not deny reality.
3. Do not rationalize failure.
4. The buck stops here.
5. Get out of the way.
6. Care about your team.
7. Be a cheerleader.
8. Be a risk taker.
9. Set goals. Devise a plan. Measure results.
10. Have a great vision. Dream big dreams.
11. Communicate Clearly.
12. Add members. Keep them.
13. Insist on accountability.
14. Leadership. It’s a journey, not a destination.

Not only is this list not distinctively Christian, it does not even mention the Gospel or God’s powerful Word. A Mormon or Muslim could just as easily be happy with it. Can you then imagine for one second, being face to face with the king of liars, the great schemer and accuser, satan himself and holding up these principles to make “pastors more confident and effective in leading their parishes and winning lost souls for eternity.”? He would shake your hand and congratulate you for your genius, as he watched those lost souls falling into the fiery depths of hell. He is not stupid. He knows that the ONLY way to win lost souls for eternity is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His forgiveness. He knows the ONLY way a pastor can be confident and effective in leading their parishes is by focusing on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The devil and all the demons of hell are rejoicing over that one lost soul that did not make it to heaven, because you were wasting time with your hard learned lessons, instead of sharing Christ’s hard won salvation. I will take one good chance to share the Gospel, over a zillion hard learned lessons any day. There is not one, single, solitary, hard learned lesson that has saved a

soul from the fiery depths of hell – not one. You can get sarcastic. You can get defensive. You can get belligerent. You can writhe and spit out fire. You can write all the papers you want against this point, but you will be wrong. Christ and Christ alone saves lost souls.

In the enchiridion of Luther's "*Small Catechism*" the question is asked, "Who should be considered for the office of pastor?" What is the answer? "Congregations are to call men who are well qualified personally and spiritually to be their pastors." "Our churches teach that nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he is regularly called (Augsburg Confession XIV)." What Bible passages are quoted? 1 Timothy 3:1–2, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [Pastor], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach." 2 Timothy 2:2, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." 2 Timothy 2:15, "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."

There is nothing here that even remotely alludes to men who are marketing experts and salesmen. It does say, "Congregations are to call men who are well qualified personally and spiritually to be their pastors," but I believe they are talking about men who are physically and mentally capable of doing the work, not men who have a degree in business. According to God, not according to man, pastors are to be able to teach, qualified to teach others, one who correctly handles the Word of truth. The ENTIRE **focus** is on God's Word.

For every second that is wasted on peripheral piffle, satan wins another lost soul for hell. For every pastor that changes his **focus** from Word and Sacrament and Law and Gospel, to business and management or leadership and communication tools, satan wins another lost soul for hell. For every layman who changes the **focus** from Christ and Him crucified to "hard learned lessons" and "experiences and observations" satan wins another lost soul for hell.

Is that being harsh? My hope and prayer is that it is so incredibly harsh that reality starts to sink in, people repent, and Christ is glorified. My hope and prayer is that every single person who is distracted by their own arrogance, their own wisdom, their own self-importance, their own hard learned lessons, their experiences and observations, will be completely jarred into the reality of a

Word and Sacrament ministry that is completely **focused** on Christ and Him crucified. You can insult me all you want. You can ignore me all you want. You can defend business principles, teaching methods, disciplinary techniques, marketing techniques and leadership skills until every cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderer, sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. In the meantime, I will continue to point my bony finger to the cross of Christ and say, “There is the power. There is the glory. There is our Leader. There is the hard won victory. There is the hard learned lesson. There is the salvation for lost souls.”

I have God’s Word, the Lutheran Confessions and every orthodox Lutheran teacher throughout history to back me up. What do you have? Hard learned lessons? Your experiences and observations? Business acumen and wisdom? Good luck battling the powers of darkness with them. Good luck on Judgment Day holding them up as your poor excuse for a “ministry.” Good luck, because that is all you have is empty luck. You do not have God’s blessings. You do not have His power, His Christ, His Gospel, His leadership, His authority, His victory, His salvation. You have nothing.

The Way It Is...

I will stick with the “14 Guidelines for the Pastor” in the article on “Pastoral Leadership,” if for no other reason, then it would be easy to go far afield with everything that is happening today. Besides, the 14 applicable hard lessons learned, make a perfect format to follow and require no other input. Again, I remind you that I have never met Mr. Eberle. I have nothing against him. I harbor no ill will and I thank him profusely for writing his article in the first place. Without his article I might never have had the joy of writing this publication. We can start with guideline #1...

#1. Give All Glory To God

I could not agree more with that sentiment. I think everyone should give glory to God, instead of glorifying themselves with phony humility. In fact, it is very Biblical. In Revelations 1:5-6 it says, “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

However, I fail to see any Biblical proof for the belief that “acknowledging our blessings come from God is the first and most important step to success in the parish ministry.” Define success. A mega-church? A church based on business principles? A church that has padded pews, a pipe organ, MIDI music, a large choir, an active youth group? What? Is this definition of success based on God’s definition of success or man’s? Who would you say was more “successful,” the Rich Man or Lazarus who ended up with the dogs licking his wounds? There is not one Bible passage that supports the idea that success includes a growing, super active, business oriented congregation. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus defines success as, “Where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them.”

Where is success used in other parts of the Bible? In Genesis chapter 24, Abraham’s servant defines success as finding a wife for Abraham. In Genesis 27 Isaac defined success as being able to catch some wild game and lie to his father about it. In Genesis 39 Joseph defined success as the Lord being with him and giving him and his Egyptian master prosperity, as well as the success he had while in prison. In 1 Samuel 18, 1 Chronicles 12:18, 1 Chronicles 22:11 David defined success as military victories, because the Lord was with him and God would help him, but only if he was careful to observe the decrees and laws that the Lord gave Moses for Israel. In 2 Chronicles 26:5 God gave Uzziah success, as long as he sought the Lord. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says skill will bring success. Not once does God say “success in the parish ministry” comes from “acknowledging the fact that we are weak sinners and that all blessings come from the Lord.”

In Philippians 4 it says, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.” Some people say we should be encouraged by Paul’s message. Paul’s message is encouraging. Some people’s personal messages are not. Paul is not saying, “You can build mega-churches, you can be successful in all you do, you can be a church growing, super pastor through Him who gives me strength.” By “everything” Paul is talking about everything that is within the will of God. He is talking about God’s Law, the Ten Commandments, the moral law, not success the way some people define it. If we want a church to grow, we must always pray, “Lord, if it be Your will,” but not arrogantly assume that just because it is our will, then it is God’s will. Again, always remember – the Gospel does NOT require a building. The success of the Gospel is NOT dependent on a building. The success of the Gospel is NOT dependent on programs, groups, pews or pads. The success of the Gospel is dependent on ONE thing and that is faith. The next

time you find yourself supporting business based ministry, repeat this sentence over and over, “The Gospel does NOT require anything but faith for success.” You can have a million buildings, with a trillion people, but without faith you have nothing.

This may sound surprising, but it is not God’s will that every church grows into a rich, super church. In Revelation 3:14ff, Jesus is talking to the church in Laodicea. He says, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” The church in Laodicea might be considered a rich, successful, prosperous, mega-church today. Did Jesus care about their riches or wealth? No. He cared about their deeds – their obedience to His Word. If they did not repent He was going to spit them out of His mouth. As far as God is concerned, success is having faith in Jesus and His holiness and living holy lives of faith everyday.

In Revelation 2:18-20 it says, “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the Words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.” The church in Thyatira might have been a super active church, full of deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance and even doing more than they did at first. Nevertheless, God still had something against them. They were tolerating Jezebel. Could it be that our modern day Jezebel is programs, opinions, methods and techniques? Could it be that we are more tolerant of worldly wisdom than we are of Godly pastors? Could it be that we are replacing deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance with groups, programs, methods, techniques and opinions? Could it be that we run after everyone who calls themselves a prophetess, without discerning between what they are saying and what God’s Word has to say? Could it be that our “sexual immorality” and “eating of foods sacrificed to idols” consists of all the gossip, hate, anger, disappointment, lack of love and pride that permeates the church today?

In Luke 15:7 it says, “There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” Could it be that God and all of heaven considers success one person at a time being saved?

#2. Do not Deny Reality

Some people would say, “If the outflow exceeds the inflow, you are going out of business,” and it might sound like worthy, intelligent, common business sense. Applying it to a congregational membership might sound like good, pious, common sense. Some people would say, “In fact, if it is not growing; it is dying.” Again, it might sound quite logical and fitting. But these are only true if you have a business orientation for your ministry. If you have a Biblical orientation of the ministry, can it ever be true? God’s Church will never go out of business. God’s Church is never dying. God’s Church cannot die. God’s Church is made up of Christians from all over the world. Why would you want to focus on the visible church and ignore the fact that the visible church is also part of the invisible Church. You cannot separate the two. Whether man has any affect on whether a visible church is successful, staying in business or dying has zero affect on the invisible Church. Visible churches come and go every day, but the invisible Church is here to stay. When you forget about the invisible Church, focus on the visible church and focus on man’s duty and wisdom and skills, you are neglecting God’s role in the success of the Church – His Church, not ours.

As Lutherans, we can apply this reality to the Lutheran Reformation. Martin Luther lost a lot of followers when the persecutions came. Was he a failure? Did the Gospel fail when the Catholic emperor stood over Luther’s grave? The Gospel never fails and God’s Church can never fail, whether your business based ministry stands or falls.

Let us just say for a moment that WELS or any other church body is slowly dying or in a crisis. So what? Do you truly believe that the invisible Church is going to collapse or go out of business or die if they cease to exist? Maybe God is fed up with the WELS or your church body and is ready to spit it out of His mouth? If that is the case, then the first step toward reversing the trend is to recognize our sins and repent. Maybe it is the fulfillment of 2 Timothy 3:1 and how there will be terrible times in the last days? If that is the case, then the first step toward reversing the trend is to recognize that things are only going to get worse. Maybe it is the fulfillment of 2 Peter

3:3, that says scoffers are going to come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. If that is the case, then the first step toward reversing the trend is to recognize that we are dealing with a far greater evil power than we can possibly imagine. We had better make absolutely certain that we are rock solid in the only tool God has given us to fight the powers of evil – the Gospel.

If nothing else, when someone makes the statement, “Do not deny reality,” and applies it liberally to every pastor, then it becomes a slap in the face of every pastor on the face of the earth. Most pastors are not stupid. They are well aware of the facts when the church is losing members. They are not oblivious to the facts, when their own congregation is losing members. And they are intelligent enough to know that they can work themselves into a heart attack or the grave and still not convince one scoffer who is hell bent on following their own evil desires. Getting in someone’s face and screaming, “Jesus loves you,” is not going to change the scoffer. Using brilliant business schemes is not going to change the scoffer. Acknowledging the reality of the Gospel – humbly and gently sharing the Gospel – being faithful to God’s Word is the only chance, the only power in the universe that can change the heart of a scoffer.

Every day you find good, faithful pastors dealing with members who are mixed up in adultery, who are drug addicts, porn addicts, spouse and child abusers, had an abortion. The things they are dealing with are physically and emotionally draining. It boggles the imagination. That pastor does not need someone saying to them, “Well done thou good and faithful servant, go now and learn more business principles.” That pastor needs to immerse himself in the Word of God. He needs to stand firm in the Lord, put on the full armor of God, be equipped with the only things that can help him do daily battle against the merciless, hateful, destructive powers of darkness. He needs the power, authority and victory of the Gospel, not business principles, man made laws, earthly wisdom, condemnation, false guilt, opinions and hard learned lessons. He needs the hard won salvation of Christ, that alone gives him the confidence and effectiveness he needs to deal with real sin, real temptation, real evil.

#3. Do not Rationalize Failure

Some people would say, “Rationalizations never lead to success in business or at the parish level.” It depends on how you define “rationalizations” and “success.” Some say, “Many pastors and their congregations are quite frustrated with their inability to reach out to the lost.” Let us do

some rationalizing about that. Let us set up all kinds of straw men and talk about them. Let us set up an entirely artificial world, based on rationalization.

You can rationalize that reaching out to the lost is only happening if a church has an artificial, super active evangelism group. You can rationalize that reaching out to the lost is only happening if you have an artificial, mega-church. You can rationalize that reaching out to the lost is only being done by a handful of churches or people. You can rationalize that reaching out to the lost is only happening when your pews are full for every worship service. You can rationalize that reaching out to the lost is only happening when your congregation is growing as fast, or faster, than the fastest growing congregation in the community. You can set up all kinds of artificial groups, programs and “ministries” to convince yourself that you are doing God’s work. But it does not make it so.

On the other hand, I do not have to rationalize anything, when I say that reaching out to the lost is only happening when the Gospel is being proclaimed. I do not have to rationalize anything, when I say that reaching out to the lost is happening whenever a Christian is sharing the Gospel, whether it is in church, at home, at work, at school or at play. I do not have to rationalize anything, when I say that reaching out to the lost is not always being done, just because a church is growing. I do not have to rationalize anything, when I say that far too many Christians have never actually shared the Gospel in their entire lives. They might have attended church, gone to Bible classes, served on committees, been officers in the congregation, but never once shared the simple Gospel message of Christ’s forgiveness to a single soul.

I will gladly take one, faithful Christian, sharing the Gospel, whenever and wherever they can, over a zillion mega-churches that are so busy with business principles, programs and other administrative tasks that the only time the Gospel is heard is an occasional Bible reading from the lectern. Show me one Christian, doing the work of an evangelist and I will show you true mission work being done. Show me a zillion mega-churches, spinning their wheels with their social, political and even religious agendas and I will show you a form of godliness that denies the power of the Gospel. What is the difference between someone shouting John 3:16 at a K.I.S.S. concert and a mega-church that is shouting the Gospel at the top of their lungs, but doing nothing to nurture faith? How many pastors, are messing up how many thousands of people, by teaching forgiveness without faith?

You can say, “I submit that any WELS congregation can grow as fast, or faster, than the fastest growing congregation in its community,” all you want. I say, “Show me the proof.” Show me in God’s Word where we have His promise on that. Show me how it is not teaching forgiveness without faith. If you are basing it on business principles and not the work of the Holy Spirit, it is an arrogant, self-elevating statement with no basis in spiritual facts.

Some would set up the straw man by saying, “Those fast growing churches do not offer the pure Word of God like we do.” And go on to say, “Does anyone really believe that the reason other churches grow fast and ours do not is because we are a more theologically conservative church body?”

Please take note of the change in focus here. There is a huge difference between the pure Word of God and a theologically conservative church body. One is a fact. One is based on the very nature of God. One is the very power, authority and victory of God over every evil power. The other is a characterization, description, classification, depiction, portrayal of a church body that may or may not rely completely on the pure Word of God. Proclaiming the pure Word of God and being theologically conservative do not always go hand in hand. It depends on how you define “theology” and “conservative.”

Glossing over the fact that mega-churches are not proclaiming the pure Word of God is denying reality. Glossing over the fact that mega-churches are not proclaiming the pure Word of God is rationalizing that they are successful, in spite of being unfaithful to God’s Word. Could it be that they may be big, but they are far from successful in the eyes of God? Could it be they may have a form of godliness, but denying the power? If so, God says have nothing to do with them. Could it be that God has already spit them out of His mouth?

Some say, “Consider for a moment who these unchurched individuals are...” then go on to say, “The truth is that most are not making their decision to attend a church on the basis of doctrine.” Which is it? Are they unchurched or are they attending a church? If they do not read their Bibles every day, do not understand the differences between the various Christian denominations, if they do not understand or care about our practice of close communion, if they are not making their decision to attend a church on the basis of doctrine, if they are just looking for someone to help solve their problems, if they are looking into a church for all the wrong reasons, what is the

difference between that and the fish and bread church, that the people wanted Jesus to be the King of in His day?

Should we answer, “Tell them it is OK not to read your Bible. Tell them the differences between the various Christian denominations do not matter. Tell them our practice of close communion is stupid and is not important. Tell them doctrine is irrelevant. Just have some pastor tell them about Jesus and leave it at that.”? Again, too many pastors and laymen are messing up thousands by teaching forgiveness without faith. It is getting worse all the time.

You would be absolutely correct in saying, “Jesus is the answer, and who should be better equipped than a pastor to bring them the only news that brings peace to the soul.” However, a pastor bringing Jesus is not the reason or a promise from God that “any WELS congregation can grow as fast, or faster, than the fastest growing congregation in its community.” Also, it had better not just be a pastor sharing Jesus. It had better be every single Christian on the face of the planet.

If an orthodox Lutheran pastor is not preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, which are the tools God has given to us to equip the saints for sharing the Gospel, then that is the problem. However, that is rarely the case. Instead of always laying a guilt trip on the pastor, let us put the pressure on where the pressure might be due.

I have known a lot of pastors in my day and quite seriously I have not met even one who just sits around doing nothing, never preaches, teaches or administers the Sacrament. I have also known a lot of lay people in my day and quite seriously I have met a few who do not even know what the Gospel is. They cannot even define it, much less share it. Is it because the pastor is too busy learning business techniques and doing administrative tasks? In some cases that might be true. However, could it also be because some lay people do not bother to come to church, skip Bible studies, do not have individual devotions, are busy fulfilling the lusts of their flesh, care more about entertaining themselves, covet the huge, successful, mega-churches, are pushing their own personal agendas or do not care about God’s Word?

You can lay the blame on the pastor all you want, but the truth is, if that pastor is being faithful to God’s Word, is preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, he is doing the work that God has called him to do. If the members of our congregations would have as much concern

about God's Word as our pastors do and less concern about their own private agendas, programs, groups, business acumen and seeing how they can make the life of the pastor miserable – I cannot make the bold promise like some do, that our congregations will grow in leaps and bounds, but I can promise they will be doing the will of God and giving Him the glory and relying on the efficacy of His Word. Right now there are way too many churches in the world that are growing, but not being faithful to God's Word and not completely relying on the efficacy of that Word.

Historic Slow Growth

Some might say, "There have always been and always will be churches that grow at a much, much faster pace." Who cares? There have always been and always will be churches that grow at a much, much slower pace or even shrinking. Just ask the Boards for Home and World Missions.

Could it be that historic rationalizations of any kind are irrelevant? Some would say, "Yes, in some cases the Christian Church has grown slowly, yet at many, many other times throughout history, especially in the beginning, the Church enjoyed exceptional growth." It has also shrunk.

I would love to see the demographics on this one! Does anyone have the statistics? In the last 2002 plus years, in how many instances has the Christian Church been growing "slowly" and how many times has it been growing "exceptionally"? Do the statistics truly show that there are more times and places when the Christian Church has seen "exceptional" growth versus "slow" growth? Where, when, why? Or perhaps the question should really be – who cares?

If you use the capital "C" for Church, I do not think it would be inappropriate to ask, who is playing God here? At any given time in history, whether the Church was growing "slowly" or "exceptionally" it was all God's work. Does anyone honestly believe that it had to do with leadership and communication skills? Do you really believe God is that limited? Or could it be that God truly is Sovereign? Could it be that no one can truly make any judgments as to the growth of God's Church? The question is often asked, "Why are some saved and not others?" The answer is always, "We do not know." Can the question be asked, "Why are some churches growing and not others?" and the answer truly be, "We do not know."?

It has been said that Islam is the fastest growing religion on earth today and from what I can tell they do very little if any canned "evangelism" or outreach. I have never seen a Muslim go door-

to-door to proselytize. What does Islam have to offer that Christianity does not? Could it be that people are drawn to Islam because whether it is right or wrong the typical Muslim is sincere about their religion? Could it be that some Christian churches are not growing because they are trying too hard to unnaturally reach out and not hard enough to genuinely live the holy Christian life? Could it be that too many churches are trying to sell themselves, instead of share the Gospel, which is exactly what Islam does not have? Could it be that many people are tired of being manipulated by marketing schemes? Could it be that many people are tired of the hypocrisy, greed, materialism, arrogance and immorality that is going on in too many so-called Christian churches today? Could there be more going on behind the scenes of the spiritual world than we could possibly know or even imagine?

Only Apostate Churches Grow Fast

Some would say, “those churches identified as fundamentalist or orthodox have grown, often at an amazing pace.” Please tell us who is identifying those churches? How do they define “fundamentalist” or “orthodox”? According to some definitions, the WELS is neither fundamentalist or orthodox. They teach the entire Bible, not just the “fundamentals.” They are “orthodox” in the sense that they adhere to the entire Scriptures as the inspired, inerrant Word of God and define their preaching, teaching, administering the Sacraments and practices according to it. They are not “orthodox” in the sense they are Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox or any other church body that is in communion with Constantinople.

I know this irritates a lot of people, but according to the WELS doctrine of fellowship, any church that they are not in fellowship with, is considered “heterodox” or “apostate” and thus is not proclaiming the pure Word of God. Therefore, any church outside of their fellowship that might be growing is not necessarily growing because of their faithfulness to God’s Word. You can no more attribute their growth to their reliance on the pure Word of God, then you can attribute their growth to the pastor having facial hair. You can make statistics tell whatever lies you want, but the truth of God’s Word stands forever. The only church that is truly growing, is a church that is faithful to His Word, that has people who are growing in faith and sharing the Gospel.

Do I believe the Gospel is an impediment to growth? Absolutely. Why do I believe that? Because the Bible teaches it. In 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 St. Paul says, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The Gospel is both the power and wisdom of God and a stumbling block and foolishness at the same time. Every time anyone proclaims the Gospel it is both creating faith and hardening hearts. It is bringing people in and driving them away. God’s Word will always accomplish what God wants it to accomplish – not what we insist it is supposed to accomplish.

Lutherans Cannot Build a Mega-Church

Some would ask, “Why are there not any WELS mega-churches?” I ask them in return, “Who cares?” Perhaps it is because most people believe smaller congregations offer much more pastoral time per member than the super church – where the pastor does not even greet people after the service? Perhaps it is because most pastors want to be ministers and not manipulators? Perhaps it is because most pastors realize that ministry is about faith and love and our relationship with God and how can anyone logically create, strengthen and sustain relationships with 8000 people? Perhaps it is because most pastors want to preach, teach and administer the Sacraments and not play politics with 8000 people? Perhaps it is because most pastors have a degree in theology and not a degree in city planning and building and rightly so? Perhaps it is because most pastors do not care about well-led, high-performance, high-expectation, high-quality organizations, but care more about churches that are faithful to God’s Word?

I have known many, many talented and wonderful pastors and laypeople, but still, perhaps it is a fact that not every pastor is a super-star minister, and not every layperson is a super-star member?

Like God said in 1 Corinthians 1:18ff, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom

did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'”

Are some saying that the WELS does not have any mega-churches because our pastors are not good leaders, high-performance, high-expectation, high-quality men? Yes, they are. Shame on them. They have some of the most highly trained, Biblical scholars on the face of the earth. After eight intensive years of Bible college and seminary, the WELS has some of the best Biblical leaders, high-performance theologians, high-expectation pastors and teachers and high quality leaders this world has ever seen.

Those pastors are very much like King David, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and even Jesus Himself, who all ended up being persecuted and dying. The only real power these men had was the power of the resurrection, the power of God's Word, the power of God behind them. King David did not have a “successful” kingdom because he was such a high and mighty person. King David had a “successful” kingdom because God gave him that success. In the eyes of the world, Jesus was a dismal failure. We know better. Who is doing the judging here?

Are we forgetting Moses who claimed to have a speech impediment? How about Jonah who ran the other way? How about Elijah who ended up feeling sorry for himself in the wilderness? How about Peter who denied his Savior? How about Paul, who obviously was a lousy leader, because he ended up in prison? You cannot name even one single person in the Bible, not even Christ Himself, who would be considered good-leaders, high-performance, high-expectation or high-

quality according to today's worldly standards. The Bible never, ever sets up those kinds of standards for pastors or lay people. Why should we? The Bible simply says, "Be perfect." You cannot get any better than that. However, that perfection is based on the holiness of Christ, not earthly success. Jesus was perfect in every way, but every last one of His followers abandoned Him. Are you willing to stand up and call Jesus a loser and unsuccessful leader? His standards are not business standards.

It is also interesting that some people focus more on pastors than the lay leadership. That also begs the question – could the problem possibly not lay in the quality of the pastoral leadership, but in the quality of some of the lay leadership? Perhaps one could argue that some of the pastors of our synod are the absolute best quality leaders on the face of the earth, while some of the lay leadership is so foul, lazy, rotten, worthless and stupid that some pastors cannot possibly get any quality work done? That may seem harsh, but listen to what others have been saying about pastors and see if they are not being just as harsh, if not more so. One is not worse or better than the other. Perhaps at times the pastor has no power for effective leadership, because some lay leadership have so stripped them of any power, that no matter what they might try to do, it would be ludicrous and laughable? Perhaps the pastor is so busy putting out forest fires, that he does not have time for planting any trees?

The following couple of paragraphs were once written by a pastor who had more than his share of trouble from laypeople. They go like this:

What is it like for a pastor to have his own church members, who claim to be Christians, hold an illegal meeting to slander him? In comparison, it is similar to the crime of rape, because it is an unlawful intrusion on his life and an immoral action that he has no control over. Why else? Because it is a sin, a hate crime, a forceful infringement upon their God-given office, a crime of hostility, with the sole intent of violating another person's rights, ruining his reputation, verbally abusing them and stripping them of their dignity. There is absolutely no love involved. Instead the pastor is dishonored, desecrated, dirtied and led to believe that it is his entire fault by corrupt, unscrupulous, detestable human accusers. How does anyone gain back his reputation once he has have been raped? They are marked for life. How does a pastor gain back his reputation when he's been slandered? A huge burden is placed on his shoulders, as if he somehow has to prove that he's not guilty. When in reality, what has he done wrong? Did he ask the people to ignore

the 8th commandment? Did he demand that the people turn a blind eye to Matthew 18? Does the high office of the ministry ever deserve vicious gossip and malicious slander? Does anyone really deserve an illegal, unconstitutional, slanderous meeting? Even if he had done something grievously wrong, is an illegal, libelous meeting the proper response? That is like saying a woman deserves to be raped. How absurd! How would you feel if you had to sit in on a bogus trial and listen to others accuse you, with no prior admonition, preparation or recourse? Remember that anything you say, can and will be used against you and already has been. The pastor has devoted his entire life to being faithful to God's Word, sharing God's love, grace and mercy and what does he get in return, but insults, molested by words and ridiculed by the same sinners he's trying to help. He is then led to wonder if anyone is listening, if anyone really cares, if his work is ever worth it, if his congregation has any Christian values or is he simply casting his pearls before the swine? Where is the justice? Where is the love? Where are the Christian virtues? Will those who call themselves Christians just stand there and watch him being raped and do nothing about it, except agree with and defend the rapist? Will anyone stand up to defend the pastor or will they all turn against him? Will any person rise up to support him or will it be like a giant mob yelling, "Punish him?" It would appear, that like our Savior, the only choice is to watch yourself being tried, accused and condemned without due process of the law, pray that they someday repent and cry out, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

However, the Bible does offer us much more comfort than that. Jesus speaks to us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10-12), saying, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." St. Paul reminds the Romans (Romans 15:3-4, "For even Christ did not please Himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on Me.' For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." St. Paul also endured many insults and weaknesses and tells us (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight

in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Is everything we suffer bad? Yes, suffering is the result of sin, however, St. Peter does encourage us with these words (1 Peter 4:13-16), “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the Name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that Name.” What greater comfort can there be, than to bear the Name of Jesus and know that you are going to spend an eternity with Him?!?

My response? How many times are we dealing with that “hit and run” parishioner that leaves us for dead? I sincerely pray that God will have mercy on the select few people who are hell bent on raping the pastor, verbally, mentally, organizationally, businessly, leadershiply, effectively and every otherly way that does not conform to the pure Word of God. Does that sound crude? Not as crude as it sounds to God’s ears, when the church and ministerium are being systematically smashed by so called worldly wisdom. God did not write the 10 Suggestions. He wrote the 10 Commandments. Could it be that we truly do not need the 100 trillion suggestions of man, we need the 10 Commandments of God?

In Matthew 10:5-31 it says, “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On My

account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

When was the last time you focused on a “**go** to the lost sheep” ministry, instead of a “build a mega-church” ministry? When was the last time you focused on a “**go**, preach this message” ministry, instead of a “we want more programs and artificial ‘ministries’” ministry? When was the last time you did not bother to take along a tunic, sandals or staff and just went and shared the Gospel? When was the last time you honestly believed “the worker is worth his keep”? When was the last time you focused on an individual house or home, instead of a gigantic building? Perhaps it is more shrewd and innocent to go door to door, than it is to build mega-edifices? Perhaps shrewd and innocent is referring to sharing the Gospel and not using earthly principles at all? Perhaps we cannot build mega-churches, because our focus is on Christ, who says, “All men will hate you because of Me.”? Perhaps we are so afraid of each other, that we have stopped being afraid of “the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell”? Perhaps we are so concerned about numbers and mega-churches, that we forget that “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” and that is what truly matters?

These Are The Last Times

Some people ask, “Can hearts actually be harder than they were when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg?” Part of the answer is in Matthew 24:10-13, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...” Does anyone honestly believe wickedness is not increasing on the earth? Does anyone know how that wickedness and lack of love might be being manifested today? Could it be manifested by those who insist that a business model for ministry is the only correct way to run a church? Could it be manifested by those who insist that their hard learned lessons are going to comfort pastors and make them effective? Could it be manifested by anyone who veers from or distracts from God’s Word and insists on the wisdom of man for growing a church?

On top of that, I do not see the point of using Martin Luther as a straw man. Were Luther’s churches all growing in leaps and bounds? Was Luther a tremendous success because people’s hearts were less hard? What is the point of comparison? Was Luther’s time any more or less the last times than they are today? I sure hope and pray that this is not only the last times, but the last year, the last month and the last day, if we are to be subjected to anymore worldly wisdom being set up as a straw man, as one more way to tear down pastors who are being faithful to their call and God’s Word!

Who is anyone to say that their business techniques and hard learned lessons are any more or less important than anyone else’s philosophy of life? I have studied psychology, science, English, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, Spanish, social studies, history, reading, writing and arithmetic (as well as much, much more) and everyone one of them has all kinds of rules and regulations, wonderful ideas, expertise to learn, perspectives to study, points of view to enumerate. Some people might say they are ALL important for the ministry and that the pastor should be an expert in EVERY area in order to be effective. That is bologna!

Some people may believe that variety is the spice of life, but could it be possible that we are being spiced to death? Are we being over-dosed on spice? Are we becoming spice addicts? Now that we have opened Pandora’s box, how are we going to keep the lid on? Is it possible that the Christian world has gone from bad to worse, from the sublime to the absurd and it has not helped the cause one bit? At what point is the world at large or the government going to shut down all

the churches, not because of blatant religious persecution, but because the churches have turned from being “religious” to businesses, from places of worship to market places, from places of solace and grace to hotbeds of entertainment, from a house of prayer to a house of idolatry, giving praise to the wisdom of man? Could it be that the Muslims are correct when they criticize the Christians for flaunting their opulence and immorality? Could it be that this entire discussion would not even be happening if churches had not veered so far off course?

Some time ago, I was in Quito, Ecuador for a month and I saw several huge Catholic Churches and a gigantic basilica, very ornate edifices, some lined with gold filigree. Outside the church were the poor, the starving and the dying – begging for a hand out. Have we got to the point where we have nothing but gilded, elaborate, lavish “ministries” while the people go away starving and dying? Have we got ourselves into such financial difficulties that our giant enterprises are finally collapsing in on themselves? Are the budgets bigger than the income? Are we bleeding the sheep dry at the expense of the Gospel ministry? Did we get so caught up in material things that the spiritual is suffering? Are we running scared, afraid to make the hard decisions? Do we see the hand writing on the wall and stand trembling? Do we have egg on our faces, because we have relied too much on special offerings, built too big of an empire, tried to justify our materialistic existence for too long? Have the cash cows died, the sugar daddies passed away and now we are stuck holding the bag? Could it be that some are failing, because they failed to plan – plan on relying on the Gospel and not Daddy Bigbucks? Could it be that all the leadership and communication tools do not work like we think they should and now we are reaping what we have sown? Could it be that all the manuals, seminars, workshops, videos, tapes, books, by-laws and constitutions are wrong? Could it be we have champagne taste on a beer income? Could it be that someone, somewhere, sometime made some colossal, stupid mistakes and now we have to deal with it?

Is Matthew 24 being used “to excuse a lack of effective evangelism”? It depends on how you define “effective” and “evangelism”. By “effective” do you mean that every time you share the Gospel someone is going to immediately come to faith? By “evangelism” do you mean that every time you share the Gospel people are going to flock to your church? Evangelism is “effective” by its very nature. Evangelism is sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it cannot help but be effective. God’s Word will never come back empty. However, true evangelism also

includes nurturing faith, teaching them to do everything Jesus commands. Could it be that we spend so much time setting up and running artificial programs, claiming we are “doing” evangelism, that our “ministries” have more to do with what we want to believe is evangelism and less to do with faith? If we believe that baptism creates faith, then why don’t we take a fire hose and spray a crowd of people at a parade, “In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?” Aside from the fact we would be arrested, it is also because we also believe there is more to faith than simply shouting out the Gospel. Faith also means having a relationship with God that needs nurturing.

Could it be that applicable verses might be Acts 14:21-23, “They preached the Good News in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.”

“They preached the Good News.” That says volumes. “We must go through many hardships.” That speaks volumes. Let us compare that with the thought, “Increased interest in religion has been tracked by national surveys...” and that might prove “the fields are ripe for harvest.” Do you think it might be possible that surveys do not really say a whole lot about the spiritual state of affairs in the world? Is it probable that surveys cannot tell you anything at all about the state of God’s kingdom in the world? Might it be feasible that surveys could not possibly determine the status of God’s fields? I think it might be far more accurate to say, that if anyone is basing their evangelism needs, efforts, effectiveness or success on the results of surveys, they might need to go back to Mark 16:15 that says, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation.”

What might possibly happen if we simply followed God’s command to “**go**” without doing demographic studies, taking surveys, asking permission from the neighboring churches? It might end up like Acts 13:49-52, “The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Please pay careful attention to the context of these passages. Were Paul and Barnabas going in to build giant edifices in their name? Were they standing with money in hand, core group in eager expectation, bricks and mortar ready to go? No. They were walking. They might have even hitched a ride on a chariot once or twice. I think we can assume that they were more than ready to build God's Church, even a congregation, but it probably did not include many of the elaborate rules and regulations we have set up for ourselves.

Just a thought... What would be wrong with going from town to town preaching the Good News and building home churches, without all the hassles of building an expensive building? What would be wrong with pastors having jobs on the side, like making tents, and roaming from house to house preaching the Good News? What would be wrong with going into an area, preaching the Good News, being persecuted and dusting our feet off in protest, without spending a lot of money on empirical data and feasibility studies? What would be wrong with shutting down every single church building on the face of the earth and having nothing but home churches and having pastors mentor future pastors in their homes and Christians doing religious home schooling?

If there is no difference between Biblical outreach and marketing, then why should not the IRS start treating every church like a business? (BTW: There really is a "Christian" company called "Outreach Marketing.") Personally, I would not object to the IRS investigating every church and denomination and start cracking down on every single one that is more concerned about entertainment, huge edifices, massive programs and dollars and cents than Christ. You could go on for days about how imperative all the scientific statistics, surveys, studies are, but being quite speculative, just how long is it going to be before the IRS catches on to these business oriented, mega-churches or even the little churches and starts charging taxes? How long will any congregation last if the IRS starts charging taxes? How long will it be before the IRS will see some of the churches in the world for the business frauds they are and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law? Perhaps the best idea would be to make long term plans right now, to beat the IRS to the punch, close every last church and just have home churches, that do not cost anyone, anything – do not require a myriad of programs, groups, organizations, boards and officers and are simply dedicated to preaching the Good News like Paul and Barnabas?

The latest byword in the ministry is "put those lay people to work." What better way could there be, to put those lay people to work, than to have them open up their homes for worship and Bible

studies? Think of the financial savings! It could be a business bonanza. There might not be a need for paying experts to rationalize our existence, to pay a huge administrative staff, to have full time presidents or all the overhead needed to run a giant church corporation. What would be wrong with talented pastors and laymen doing work from their homes? Could it be that many church bodies were quite healthy when they had almost no administration, but now they are dying both spiritually and outwardly with lots of administration and huge overhead expenses?

I know it sounds like a radical idea, but what would be wrong with going back to a New Testament model for a home church? For instance, in Philemon 1-2 it says, “To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home.” Let your imagination run wild and think of the possibilities. Fellow workers, women, soldiers, all meeting in homes!

What are some of the excuses you will probably hear? “We’ve never done it like that.” (So what?) “What, no padded pew?” (Are they really necessary?) “Where am I going to hang the plaque with my name on it?” (Hang it in your house.) “It will never work.” (You never know until you try.) “What about my pension and insurance plans?” (Get a job that offers them.) “I cannot live without my altar and pulpit.” (Why not?) “What are we going to do when we all want to worship together in one big group?” (What do you do now? How about rent a place, go to the local park, meet at the beach, gather by the river, gather in the woods, find a warm cave, have a nice get together and then go back home.) “It is hard giving up my teddy bear and security blanket.” (My kids will attest to that.) “We cannot afford it.” (It does not cost anything, remember?) “What about our seminaries and schools?” (Why not try pastors training pastors, since we are doing that already and parents training children in the instructions of the Lord, since that is what they are supposed to do anyway?) “It will scare people away.” (Just how many people are already scared away by your church building, programs, liturgies, rules and regulations?) “We would lose control.” (Perhaps you never had it in the first place or you should let go of it and let God have control?) “I could not tell people the name of my church or synod.” (How about telling them, “Jesus loves me this I know. For the Bible tells me so.”?) “I am scared.” (I do not blame you, but there are plenty more that are just as scared of the direction that the Christian church is taking today.) “There must be a better idea.” (I am listening...) “The Gospel does not need any building.” (You are right...)

In Acts 16:6ff it says, “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them. From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”

Again, let us use our imaginations. What would be wrong with establishing “places of prayer” outside, by the river, where people gather? It would not cost a penny. We might even find people who would listen and invite us to their house. How absurd can it be, if it is in the Bible? Perhaps the question should be, is it really, truly and absolutely necessary to spend millions of dollars on giant edifices, administration buildings, race tracks, gymnasiums, football fields, pipe organs and MIDI music? Or could we really do some fantastically effective ministry by preaching the Gospel in the place where God has put us, by chasing the vision of those calling for us to preach the Gospel to them? And just as an aside, could it possibly be that the WELS does not have any mega-churches because the Holy Spirit is keeping us from it or the Spirit of Jesus is not allowing us to have them? If that is the case, just who is kicking against the pricks? Now that is a scary thought!

Let us go worse case scenario. Let us ask what is the worst possible thing that could happen if every major church or synod headquarters went bust, bankrupt, out of existence, belly up? My guess is that individual Christians would take up the slack, keep worshipping together, still have

Bible studies, still preach, teach and administer the Sacraments and do it all in the power of the Lord. Now for the big question... What is wrong with that? Is not that historically where we started in the first place and might it be where we should be in the second place? Could it be that the Gospel does not need our buildings, plans, programs, groups and headquarters?

When I was a kid I wanted toy after toy after toy and could pester my mother to no end about how important it was that I have those toys. I could come up with some awesome arguments about how essential they were. I could take surveys of other children to show how necessary they were. I could bring in experts who would attest to the utter value and necessity of them. I could scream until I was blue in the face and throw a temper tantrum. But all she would say is, "Quit your whining and be content with what you have." Where could she possibly come up with a philosophy like that? My guess is that it was from Philippians 4:11-13, "For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." And 1 Timothy 6:8-10, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." And Hebrews 13:5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

For twenty years I have seen, heard and experienced laypeople and pastors alike, pestering for their pet ideas, coming up with awesome arguments about how essential they are, taking surveys to show how necessary they are, calling in experts to attest to the utter value of them, screaming and throwing temper tantrums when they did not get their way. My recommendation is to tell the whole lot of them, "Quit your whining and be content with what you have." And remember, "The Gospel and God's kingdom does not require a building..."

Lutheran Churches Cannot Grow

Some have said, “A study was recently conducted within the WELS comparing fast growing WELS churches with non-growing WELS churches. After comparing all the different circumstances the conclusion was, ‘The only real variable is the quality of leadership.’” Given those kind of statistics and studies, would it be appropriate to recommend that every single WELS pastor, except the ones who have honed and sharpened their leadership and communication skills resign, effective immediately? After all, you cannot argue with numbers, success, studies, conclusions. Or can you?

Let us see a copy of that study. What questions were asked? What numbers were crunched? Who defined “quality of leadership”? Who and what determined that the only “real variable” was the quality of leadership? I have seen the book, *Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics*. Could this study possibly be tainted by any bias? Does this study exist at all? Or once again, could the problem partially be the lay leadership and not the pastoral leadership? OK, let us be like Luther and put the best construction on everything. Let us assume the study does exist and the only real variable is the quality of leadership (whatever that means). Does the study tell us the quality of the growth? Does the study look into the hearts of the pastor and members and try to make judgments about their faith? Does the study take into account the fact that God is the One who determines the quality of leadership? Could it be that the Gospel does not require buildings? Could it be that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world? Perhaps we should all quit coveting numbers and not get all puffed up if things go well for a time or depressed if they do not go well. Perhaps we should simply rely on God’s Word alone and let God do the measuring?

Some have also said, “It is God who gives out the talents and abilities we have and He also provides the opportunities for honing and sharpening those talents and abilities.” I have a thought. What would be wrong with blaming God for not giving out the talents and abilities in the first place? His article admitted, “Not everyone has the same skills and talents and certainly not at the same levels.” Let us ask this question... If God is the One who gives out the talents and abilities and not everyone has the same skills and talents and not at the same levels, then how can we possibly lay the guilt on the person who has not been given the talents, abilities, skills and levels? Can God ever be at fault, if we are talking about faith and not buildings?

Some might ask the question about the pastors of the five fastest growing WELS congregations (or any other fast growing congregation in the world) – how do they do it? I too have a couple of questions. How come the pastors of the fastest growing churches do not leave their calls and go to declining congregations to show everyone how to do it? What do you honestly think would happen if they did move somewhere else, say to another country? I honestly think some, if not all of them would be dismal failures. What do you honestly think would happen if they moved to Olnes, Alaska, Los Alamos, New Mexico or Mist, Oregon? I honestly think they would all be dismal failures. If they do move somewhere else, are you going to let those “successful” pastors, with growing churches, have all the same kind of lay leadership they have now? Are you going to give them the same amount of money they have at their present churches? Is the population in the new area going to be the same? Let us compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges. St. Paul was a dismal failure in one area and a tremendous success in others. For instance, in Acts 14:1 it says, “At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.” However, right after that, in Acts 14:19 it says, “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.” Was it his superior business acumen and skills that made the difference?

Do some deny the work of the Holy Spirit when they say, “Of course not! After all, we know that, “no one can say that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Where is the comparison? Can you take fast numerical growth and assume all those people, in all those growing churches are saying, “Jesus is Lord”? Putting the best construction on everything, we could possibly assume that, but what if we are wrong? What if all the studies, statistics and assumptions are entirely incorrect and we find out later that numbers are being padded and people were not being instructed? That is rough relying on surveys and studies. Or what if you found out that it had more to do with the quality of the lay leadership? Or better yet, what if you found out later, that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the “quality of leadership” and had everything to do with the work of the Holy Spirit? Considering the fact that this is what the Bible says, could it possibly be much safer to rely on God’s Word than surveys, studies and statistics?

Some would say, “the instrument that is sharpened and honed regularly will work better than the one that is left to rust.” I could not agree more! I would highly recommend that every pastor and

layperson in the entire world put away the remotes, stay away from the meetings, seminars, workshops, videos, books and tapes and open their Bibles and start honing the gifts that God has given them. If your gift is being a pastor, then hone that gift. If that gift is being a teacher, then hone that gift. If that gift is being an administrator, then hone that gift. But quit confusing the gift of a pastor with the gift of an administrator and vice versa. Quit confusing earthly gifts with spiritual gifts. Quit insisting that pastors have gifts that God has no intention or desire to give them. Quit insisting that pastors need to be “honed” by worldly wisdom, instead of God’s Word. Quit insisting on a highly successful earthly kingdom, when Christ has given us a heavenly kingdom.

Every day we are bombarded by newspapers, radio, TV, the Internet, books, magazines by millions upon millions upon millions of brilliant ideas. Everyone is insisting that they have the best product, the greatest scheme, the most brilliant proposal. We are being lied to, manipulated and facing information overload. Remember the old saying, “Garbage in, garbage out?” Could it possibly be that we need to dump the garbage and get back to good old fashioned, boring, dull, routine, focused, Word and Sacrament ministry? Could it be that pastors and laypeople need to go back and read, mark and inwardly digest Isaiah 26:3, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”? How can your mind be at perfect peace, when you know you are not the perfect businessman, the perfect salesman, the perfect pastor, outside of the perfection that has been given to us freely through Christ?

It Is Not My Responsibility

Some would say, “Numerous verses in Scripture can be quoted showing that the Lord expects results.” Some might mention Acts and the numbers of conversions listed there, but could it be that the rapid growth in Acts had nothing to do with marketing skills or business acumen? Some might bring up the parable of the talents, but could it be that it is not talking about “results” but faithfulness, especially since Jesus very specifically says, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21)? Could it also be that Jesus was talking about something other than congregational membership, especially since Jesus very specifically says, “For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.” (Matt 25:29)?

St. Paul talked about results. In 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 he said, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Could it be we are not getting results, because we are no longer getting our competence from God? Could it be that we are not getting results, because we are becoming ministers of the letter that kills, instead of the Spirit that gives life? Could it be that we are not getting results, because we are wasting so much time with marketing skills and business techniques that we are doing very little, if any ministry at all? It strikes me that the rationalization that denies the fact that our responsibility is to share the Gospel and nurture faith, that the Holy Spirit adds the increase and that the Lord expects results – might just be changing the **focus** away from the need to share the Gospel and relying on the Holy Spirit. It might just be changing the **focus** away from God’s Word and putting it on our leadership skills and communication tools.

In Proverbs 6:16-19 it says, “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” Could it be that there are way too many people in churches today, that have haughty eyes, a lying tongue, are shedding innocent blood, devising wicked schemes, quick to rush into evil, are false witnesses who pour out lies and are stirring up dissension among brothers? For instance, do you have any idea how a pastor or his wife feels when a church official privately interrogates the pastor’s wife, because some deviant member has falsely accused the pastor of being a liar, when in reality the member was the one devising wicked schemes and being a false witness? Do you have any idea how a pastor suffers when his entire life is being scrutinized by haughty eyes, lying tongues and hands that are shedding innocent blood? Do you care how much torment and torture a pastor endures when some members of the congregation are quick to rush into evil, pouring out lies and stirring up dissension? Could it be there is a lack of conversions, because too many people are spreading lies, instead of spreading the Gospel – being detestable instead of loving?

As another aside, would it really be improper to blame the Holy Spirit for the lack of conversions? In Acts 16:6ff it says, “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” Could it be possible that the Holy Spirit is keeping us from preaching the Word in some cases and not allowing us to reach out in others?

Do Not Look At Numbers

Some would say, “All sorts of numbers of conversions are mentioned in the Book of Acts.” And “chapters 2, 4, 5 and 8 of Acts count numbers ‘big time.’” Instead of resorting to big time hyperbole, let us actually look at some of those numbers. Acts 2:41, “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 4:3-4, “But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.” Acts 6:1, “In those days the number of disciples was increasing.” Acts 6:3-4, “We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” Acts 6:7, “So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

Now those are impressive numbers! I would absolutely LOVE to have thousands of people added in one day! Who would not? But again, what is the **focus**? Is the **focus** on numbers or is it on the message, the ministry of the Word, the Word of God and what the Lord was doing? I think you know the answer.

Now let us take it one more step. Is there even one shred of evidence that those thousands upon thousands of new converts started building mega-churches, huge edifices, with praise bands, PowerPoint presentations, clowns, workshops, numerous self-help groups and the AAL? In keeping with the books of Acts (2:42), it says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” It does not mention anywhere about mega-churches or even simple things like potluck dinners, padded pews, altars and pulpits, pipe organs, hymnals, youth groups or Ladies Aid societies. Could it be that those things are adiaphora and added later – much later? Could it be that adiaphora and the things

added later are what is driving too many churches today and not the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer?

Some would say, “The parable of the talents focuses exclusively on numbers.” Again, could it be that it is not talking about “numbers” at all but faithfulness, especially since Jesus very specifically says, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21)? Could it also be that Jesus was talking about something other than congregational membership, especially since Jesus very specifically says, “For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.”? Could it be that the Gospel does not require a building or our business expertise?

Some would say, “After all, if we do not care about the numbers, why do we publish the *Statistical Report*?” Could it be that we publish statistics because we like numbers and God could not care less? Did not King David get in trouble when he started to do some counting? Could it be that the statistical report does not accurately report all those who are believers? Could it be that the statistics represent the visible church and not the invisible Church and we have no clue how many of them are believers or unbelievers?

Some would say, “The bottom line is that if we are to be effective in sharing the Gospel in our communities we cannot rationalize failure.” Did not Jesus say in Luke 18:8, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Sounds pretty negative to me. Once again, in Acts 16:6ff it says, “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” Could it possibly be that the Holy Spirit is keeping us from preaching the Word in some cases and Jesus is not allowing us to reach out in others?

Some would say, “Pastors, like everyone else in God’s Church, need to keep their leadership and communications tools sharpened and well-oiled.” Do you think God might have put it better, when He said in Galatians 6:2-5, “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” And Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” What does God say the pastors should be honing? 1 Timothy 4:13-16 says, “Until I come, devote

yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” In Titus 1:7-12 it says, “Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.” Titus 2:1 says, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”

Could it be that God never, ever mentions “leadership and communications tools” because He cares more about life and doctrine? Could it be that the insistent **focus** on Christ, Scripture, preaching, teaching, life, the trustworthy message and sound doctrine is stressed because those are the things God wants us to be honing and not “leadership and communications tools”? Could it be that pastors are wasting so much time on “leadership and communications tools” that they are neglecting the important things, like Scripture, preaching, teaching, life, the trustworthy message and sound doctrine?

#4. The Buck Stops Here

Some would say, “I am not suggesting that every pastor and his congregation can overcome every difficulty, but 99 times out of 100, pastors have no one to blame but themselves.” Please pause now, to take a very deep breath. Up to this point I have remained calm and laissez-faire. However, in my opinion this particular statement is not only dead wrong, but it is judgmental, legalistic, injudicious and ludicrous. Of all the statements someone could make, this is by far, in my opinion, the most hateful, despicable, pastor-destroying statement of all. If it is true that anyone honestly believes 99 times out of 100 pastors have no one to blame but themselves, then I would recommend that they leave the church altogether. I would hope and pray a statement like this would simply be made out of ignorance or lack of knowledge and not out of some malicious,

malevolent, cruel attempt to discredit every pastor that has ever lived or who has ever had problems. Does every parent who has a child go bad, have no one to blame but themselves? Do Christ's apostles have no one to blame but themselves for being martyred? Does Jesus have no one to blame but Himself for being crucified? Is there any proof or excuse of any kind for such an inflammatory statement?

While I was in Pittsburgh, I helped out at the "Center for Victims of Violent Crime." Similar kinds of statements were often being made about the victims by the perpetrators. "I raped them. I beat them. I abused them. I stabbed them. I shot them. But they have no one to blame but themselves. It was all their fault. They wore smutty clothes. They provoked me. They sassed me."

There has been a lot of talk about pastors who are abusers, but could there possibly be pastor abusers in the world? Could it be that statements like, "99 times out of 100, pastors have no one to blame but themselves," give these abusers another excuse to abuse the pastor?

Perhaps putting 99% of the blame on pastors is a very serious accusation against God and His Word in Isaiah 55:8-11? It is hugely chilling, especially in the light of James 3:1-2 that says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." If 99% of the time pastors are the only ones to blame, they are in double trouble! Is anyone really willing to stand before God on Judgment Day and make that statement?

Who is the king of liars? Who is the great accuser? Who or what would motivate anyone to make a blatantly false statement about pastors like that? Did it come from the Bible? Did the Holy Spirit motivate that? James says in 5:9, "Do not grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!" My hope and prayer is that people who blame the pastor 99% of the time really do not mean what they say. If that is the case, and I have no reason to assume otherwise, I extend to them Christ's full forgiveness, but I also admonish them to go and sin no more!

Some would say, "I have to be responsible for my own decisions and actions and the same goes for the pastor as the spiritual head of his congregation." This might be a true enough statement,

but then again, how often is the pastor responsible for the decisions and actions of the congregation or the decisions and actions of individual members? Perhaps not in every congregation in the world, but in every WELS congregation, pastors have no legal or constitutional right to make any major decisions and very few minor ones. They can give advice. They can suggest. They can even cajole. But when push comes to shove, every major and many minor decision and action is made by the voters' assembly and in how many cases do the pastors even have a vote?

Many decisions and actions are made without the pastor's knowledge. Many decisions are made on board and group levels, where the pastor is not involved. Many decisions and actions are made on an individual level, where the pastor does not have control or even want it. Could it be that some are not talking at all about "decisions and actions," but about control? Do some people want every pastor to control the congregation on every level? Would some suggest we go back to the "Herr Pastor" mentality? Should pastors be control freaks? Yes, pastors should be responsible for their *own* decisions and actions, but could it be that God does not hold them accountable for the bad decisions and actions of others and no one else should either?

Some would say, "Pastors must accept responsibility for the effective leadership of their congregations." Why? How? Does it say that in the Bible? Be specific. How often does the pastor get to choose the other leadership in the congregation? Perhaps every church should change the rules, so the pastor can hire and fire all the congregational leadership? Could it be, if every pastor had a business degree from Harvard, they might still have failing congregations, because some of the people they have to work with are lousy leaders or followers? Aside from that, define, "effective." Define, "leadership." Those are both extremely broad terms. Volumes have been written on both of them. Could it be that God defines "effective leadership" as, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."? Could it be that the Gospel does not need our leadership, but gives us holiness and Christ's faithfulness?

#5. Get Out Of The Way

Some would say, "The businessmen in our congregations understand all too well that top-down, autocratic organizations are dysfunctional." I openly admit that I am not an expert on running a business, even though I ran my own business for about five years and my father was at one time

the president of the National Management Association for The Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan. However, I do know that the church is one major exception when it comes to autocratic organizations. Why do I say that? Not because I believe God is overbearing, despotic, tyrannical, oppressive, dictatorial and arbitrary, which is basically the meaning of “autocratic,” but because God is the head of the Church and every congregation. There is room for only One Head and it is not the pastor or the lay people. Our churches should be run on the basis of God’s Word. If we are getting too wrapped up in all the administrative details, then perhaps we should step back, take a critical look at what we are doing and stop doing it. Perhaps we do not need all the programs, groups, boards, workshops, meetings, manuals, seminars, videos, books, tapes and other distractions? Perhaps we would be better off if we threw out everything but the pews and the Bibles and just sat for a couple of hours each week to study the Bible together, listen to the pastor give a sermon, humbly worship our God and take the Lord’s Supper together? Does that sound too simplistic, too radical? Try it once. You might like it! Are you not ready to give up your sweets and desserts, even though what you might be witnessing is the rotten stench of spiritual tooth decay? Are you not in enough pain yet? Are there not enough pastors or churches that have suffered already? Do you think you can make everything better through an organizational root canal? That is a mighty expensive proposition! Would not it be cheaper just to kick the sugar addiction and get back to the milk and meat of the Gospel?

Some would say, “Today there are many good resources to assist [pastors] in their professional development.” Personally, I would highly recommend the Bible. Some would say, “Unless and until our pastors turn loose and quit worrying about all the details, our congregations will continue to be stuck in neutral.” Good point! Could it be that every single pastor should quit worrying about bulletins, programs, groups, boards, workshops, meetings, manuals, seminars, videos, books, tapes and other distractions and get back to the comfort of God’s Word?

Some would say, “Pastors who second-guess... Pastors who interrupt... Pastors who insist on speaking up or even taking over... Pastors who micro-manage everything... It simply does not work.” I agree completely!!! Could it be that every single pastor should quit worrying about managing bulletins, programs, groups, boards, meetings, manuals, seminars, videos, books, tapes and other distractions and get back to proclaiming the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Some would say, “Turning loose is the first step in building a congregation that reaches out effectively to the lost.” I agree again! Could it be that every single pastor should turn loose the bulletins, workshops, programs, groups, boards, meetings, manuals, seminars, videos, books, tapes and other distractions and get back to the One Thing needful? Could it be the Gospel is sufficient?

#6. Care About Your Team

Some would say, “Hugs and pats on the back are just as important in the office (or in the church) as they are in the home.” I sure wish more people would give pastors a hug and pat on the back! Although, from a different perspective, I can tell you horror stories about pastors who have been accused of sexual harassment for an innocent hug or pat on the back.

On the other hand, some would say, “If members are to be compassionate toward each other, their pastor must show compassion to everyone – clearly and visibly.” Maybe there is something to this, after all the Bible does say in Romans 16:16, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In 1 Corinthians 16:20, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In 2 Corinthians 13:12, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:25-26, “Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.” In 1 Peter 5:14, “Greet one another with a kiss of love.” Perhaps we should all give that a try? Perhaps at the end of the service, instead of shaking hands, we should give everyone a holy kiss?

At any rate, who is to decide what is sympathy and compassion and what is coldness and callousness? I have known some pastors who could preach a sermon in the most boring way in the world, but at the hospital bed they were a bastion of comfort. I have known some pastors who have no bedside manners whatsoever, but could preach some of the most awesome Gospel sermons I have ever heard. Could it be that the most compassionate thing we could do, would be to quit picking on the pastor’s faults and start concentrating on his good qualities?

On the other hand, when it comes to “compassion,” I have known some people, that if you tried to hug them they would slug you. While I have known others that you better not leave the room without hugging them or you are definitely in trouble. Someone might bring up an example about one pastor who had the congregation sing “Happy Birthday” to a 90 year old lady and declare that to be a warm, wonderful way of expressing love to this old lady. That might be true in one case, but for some other lady you might get a black eye. One man’s sympathy and

compassion can be another man's sexual harassment. We live in a bizarre world, where people judge every little thing you do, scrutinize every small movement, eye twitch, facial expression. Perhaps we should stop being so critical and judging others and just love them the way they are? Perhaps we should be sharing the love of Christ and not love as we define it?

Some would say, "What better example have we to follow than Christ Himself?" Excellent thought! In particular I would recommend John 2:13-16, "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves He said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!'" And Matthew 12:34-35, "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." And Matthew 23:27-28, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Could it possibly be that the most sympathetic, compassionate thing a pastor could do would be to enter the church and dump everything out and start over with just a Bible? Could it possibly be that the most sympathetic, compassionate thing a pastor could do would be to rebuke the materialistic, world loving, demonic, business oriented schemes and go back to preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? Could it be that the most sympathetic, compassionate thing a pastor could do is to face up to the hypocrisy, wickedness and arrogance and actually deal with it for a change, instead of glossing over it, ignoring or denying it – just like they deal with all the delinquents on the list, all the members shacking up, all the drunks, drug addicts and abusers? Could it be that the most sympathetic, compassionate thing a pastor could do is to dump the entire membership and start from scratch, making everyone study the Bible all over again, only this time taking it seriously and not just doing it because Mommy and Daddy said you had to?

In 1 Peter 3:8 it says, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." Could this be every pastor's dream? Could we

finally have that kind of harmony, sympathy, love, compassion and humility if we would just quit howling about our pet schemes, hard learned lessons and materialistic, business oriented goals? Could we have this kind of harmony, sympathy, love, compassion and humility if we took the Bible seriously and actually put into practice everything it says? Could we have this kind of harmony, sympathy, love, compassion and humility when we quit trying to build a successful earthly kingdom and relied on Christ to build His heavenly kingdom?

#7. Be A Cheerleader

Some would say, “Pastors, too, will be surprised at the impact cheerleading can have on their congregation.” Perhaps in some respect that might be true. Personally, I have nothing against cheerleaders. Some of the nicest girls I have known have been cheerleaders. I have close relatives who have taught cheerleading and been a cheerleader. I am sure they somehow must serve a useful purpose. However, life is very much like a multi-faceted diamond. You can look at it from all kinds of different perspectives. Perhaps not all of you have had this experience, but I can distinctly remember the effect of some of the cheerleaders at our high school. I can honestly say it had an immoral impact on some of the guys when the girls jumped up and down showing off their under garments. Some guys got excited to see them gyrating, twisting, turning, dancing to the music and looking hot and sexy. For some, whatever game that might have been going on really did not matter, as long as the cheerleaders looked tempting and cute. I am not trying to demean each and every cheerleader, be crude or disgusting. My point is this: Whether you like it or not the reality is, different people look at cheerleaders in very different ways. Not all of them are God pleasing. For some distorted people a good number of cheerleaders are nothing but shallow carnal pleasure. Also, as supportive, wonderful and entertaining as cheerleaders might be, I cannot remember any game being won or lost because of the cheerleaders. Perhaps there have been studies done that show the difference between how many teams have won or lost due to the cheerleaders or lack thereof? Perhaps there have been studies done on exactly what kind of impact cheerleaders have had on the technical aspects of the game? Perhaps someone can truly answer if they really add anything of substance to the game at all? That would be just fine. No offense to the cheerleaders, but cheerleading still has nothing to do with the Gospel and the kind of impact that comes from having the Holy Spirit.

Some would say, "I have found that simply by staying in close touch with everyone and praising their efforts and giving them encouragement, there is a dramatic shift that takes place." Is that what cheerleaders do? Do they stay in close touch, praise efforts and give encouragement? If that is the case then fantastic, but quite seriously I wonder if they could possibly do that without showing off their under garments? Is it really necessary for the sake of praise and encouragement to look hot and sexy? Unfortunately for the really nice girls, who do their best to be good, moral, upright cheerleaders, there are all kinds of wild stories about some not so nice cheerleaders, in locker rooms, in the back of buses and so on. Do we really want to go there? I would hope not. Again, my point is not to degrade every cheerleader or be vulgar, but to honestly evaluate if we really want pastors who are cheerleaders? Staying in close touch, praising and encouraging is one thing, but cheerleading? Is that what the Gospel is all about or even remotely about? Could it possibly be taking things to the shallowest outermost limits? Taking it to the utter extreme, how long before the "experts" suggest all pastors should be like King David and dance before the Lord with all their might in nothing but a linen ephod? That might conjure up some gross and disgusting thoughts, but do not be surprised if someday someone does just that, if they have not already. For the sake of modesty, why not just stick with preaching and teaching the Gospel and leave cheerleading out of it?

In Proverbs 15:30 it says, "A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones." I sure cannot argue with the Bible, that is why I share these quotes from the Bible. Matthew 26:36-38, "Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.'" Luke 19:41, "As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it." John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Matthew 16:23, "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"

Could it be that many pastors are not too cheerful or joyful because they are bearing the cross of a ministry that is based on materialism and man's wisdom and not the Bible? Could it be that some pastors souls are overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, because they are bearing the sins of all the greed, selfishness and worldly rubbish that infests the churches of today?

Could it be that Peter had a rather difficult time seeing any cheerfulness in Jesus when he was being called satan? And could it be that some of our members are a wee bit overly sensitive when we point out their sins? Could it be that some people are really, really angry with the pastor, because he did not agree with their pet idea that they are really, really passionate about?

Some would say, “They [pastors] have the most exciting job in the world.” It is exciting all right. It is exciting to be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down by laymen and fellow pastors alike, who are forcing their hard earned lessons onto the pastor who is faithful to God’s Word. It is definitely exciting to **focus** on Christ our Savior and heaven as our home!!!

Some would say, “If pastors want to energize their members and give them the kind of leadership they seek and deserve, then they must be provided with continuous support and encouragement.” Should we be giving support and encouragement to the member who is beating his wife, having sex with his girlfriend, smoking dope, watching porn or smack talking the pastor behind his back? You bet! We should be giving them the support and encouragement of the Law. Like St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:2-5, we should, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

Perhaps there are times when we need to put on an ugly face and support and encourage our members with, “Get thee behind me satan.”? Perhaps there are times when we need to be down right supportive and encouraging and call our members snakes, white washed tombs, broods of vipers or hypocrites? Maybe there are even times when we need to be incredibly supportive and encouraging by letting them know what slimy worms and maggots they really are! But perhaps the “experts” would suggest the pastor should do that with a smile on his face and say, “Just kidding.”?

Some would say, “Is it unreasonable to expect pastors to be positive and upbeat with a smile on their faces and a bounce in their step? And why not?” Good question! Could it be, because

according to Romans 8:17, “If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” Perhaps it is because they are like St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:21-30, “What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Not to be crass, but perhaps they are not smiling and bouncing because they are constipated, have diarrhea, have ulcers, have cancer, have arthritis, did not get enough sleep the night before, went to too many potlucks, smoke too many cigarettes, had one too many beers, were just beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked? Perhaps they are sad because some member just told them how stupid they were for not being an exceptional, effective leader? Perhaps they are sick to their stomach, because they just told someone their sins were forgiven for Jesus sake and that person said, “Thanks. I feel much better. Now I feel free to go out and have sex with my girlfriend!”?

Some would say, “No one in the world should have more enthusiasm for their job than Christian pastors. Just as it says in the 4th chapter of Philippians: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!’ Every Christian has a reason to be joyous, especially pastors. They know everything turns out perfectly!”

I understand the word “rejoice,” but stumble a bit over how “rejoice” and “enthusiasm” go together, so I looked up the word “enthusiasm” in the Bible and it was there twice!

2 Corinthians 8:17, “For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.” And 2 Corinthians 9:1-3, “For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.”

I still fail to see how “enthusiasm” and “rejoicing” always go together Biblically, but it is nice to know that there were some people who had “enthusiasm” in the Bible! Perhaps more pastors and laypeople should have enthusiasm and initiative to do God’s work? Perhaps if more laypeople were enthusiastic about God’s Word, it would help stir others to action? However, no perhaps about it, enthusiasm never saved one single, solitary soul, but the Gospel did. Enthusiasm does not forgive sins, create or sustain faith. Perhaps the kind of enthusiasm that some people are looking for can get pretty nauseating? Perhaps the kind of enthusiasm that goes along with some cheerleading is so devoid of meaning, so shallow, so petty, so worthless that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Biblical enthusiasm that is being talked about in these two passages? Perhaps people need to be realistic and honest and admit that their pastor is still human? Perhaps it is a big fat lie, that even one pastor exists on the face of the earth, that only runs around with a grumpy, sour look on his face everyday? Perhaps, like most everyone else on the face of the earth, pastors have good days and bad days? Perhaps all pastors should run around giving everyone a holy kiss? That might cheer everyone up!!! Perhaps we should stick with the joy of the Gospel?

The world talks a lot about “self-esteem.” Cheerleaders build up self-esteem. Good for them. What about God-esteem? Why would anyone want to trade God-esteem for self-esteem? Does our “self” really have a whole lot to offer? Is there really that much about ourselves to be esteemed? Does not God, on the other hand, give us perfect esteem? Has not God made us children of God and heirs of eternal life? Has not God made us to be a kingdom and priests? Does it not say in Luke 18:14, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”? Does it not say in Luke 12:24-25, “Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” Is it possible that esteem and value are the same thing and they totally come from God? Is it possible that the kind of esteem God wants us to have is His love,

mercy, grace, forgiveness, holiness, righteousness, perfection and our status as a citizen of heaven and not our pride, arrogance, superciliousness, self-importance, superiority or egotism?

#8. Be A Risk Taker

Some would say, “Reaching out to the lost demands that pastors be risk takers and entrepreneurs who experiment with forms and concepts to most effectively reach out to the lost in their communities. One does not have to compromise doctrine in order to experiment with new bridge-building techniques to reach the lost. Try to eliminate the roadblocks to opening doors to searchers... That is why pastors need as many ideas and concepts as their members can come up with.”

Does not reaching out to the lost demand the proclamation of the Gospel? Could it possibly be that all of the myriad of novel ideas might not be compromising the doctrine, but compromising the delivery of the message, making a mockery of it, becoming white noise, so blending in with the world that people cannot tell the difference? Is it possible our “ministries” are becoming completely ineffective – like too many antibiotics, because we are ignoring the Gospel? Perhaps the Christian radio stations, TV stations, magazines, books, CD’s, videos, tapes, DVD’s, bracelets, pencils, bookmarks, bumper stickers, wall hangings, quilts, shirts, pants, underwear, socks, hats, pins, patches, buttons, candy, toys, infinitum, are all lulling us to sleep? Perhaps the answer is not more and more and more ideas and concepts, but simply preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments?

Ever hear of KISS? **Keep It Simple Stupid**. Perhaps KISS should become our new motto? Perhaps we should just dump all the outward trappings, grab a Bible and just go? Perhaps we do not need to take any of the kinds of risks some people are talking about, because sharing the Gospel is risk free? Although, I have known pastors who have been slugged in the face by their own members, had guns and knives pointed at them by supposed Christians, even had someone shoot something from a sling shot at them – so that is probably not correct. But perhaps the kind of risks the Bible is talking about and the kind of risks others talk about do not jive?

Perhaps we should risk individual relationships with people, actually making contact with people’s soul through the Gospel, making a genuine effort to reach them with Christ, meeting

them where they are at, actually taking the time to get to know them? Perhaps we like to hide behind all our religious paraphernalia, so that we do not ever have to get seriously involved in someone's life? Perhaps we are so afraid of being rejected, hurt or empathetic that we like to pretend we are doing some kind of awesome ministry when we have a ton of programs, groups, boards, seminars, meetings and surveys? Perhaps we love to build artificial "ministries" to convince ourselves that we are really and truly doing the work of the ministry when we are not? Perhaps we have been hurt so many times, that we are numb inside and feel like we have nothing to give, because we do not understand the power of the Gospel? Perhaps we do not want to talk to someone because they are fat, skinny, ugly, pretty, tall, short, smelly, perfumery, smart, ignorant or downright scary? Perhaps we do not want to cast our pearls before the swine? Perhaps when dealing with others we should always ask, "What is my goal? Is my goal to minister, encourage and share the love of Jesus, or is it to manipulate, demand and tear down?" Perhaps, whenever the goal of our action is primarily to change another person—whether the change is good or bad—WE are wrong? Perhaps, if our goal is not to share Christ's love, based on an accurate awareness of the other person's needs, we qualify as a manipulator, NOT a minister? Perhaps, the key to sharing Christ's love, is to maintain the primary goal of ministering to others deepest needs, and not trying to fulfill our own desires? Maybe our struggles are all from the devil and we should always apply the victory and authority of Christ?

#9. Set Goals. Devise A Plan. Measure Results.

Some would say, "Working with a congregation's lay leadership, pastors should set annual goals, and have confidence that they will succeed, for as it says in Proverbs 16:3, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

I must be doing something wrong or have a lack of faith or something, because every year I set a goal of making \$5,000,000.00, but it never works. I commit it to the Lord, but it never succeeds. I even make plans on how to spend it. Maybe it is because I do not ever pray, "Lord, if it be Thy will"? Perhaps it is because you can quote Bible verses all day and all night, but it still does not mean that just because you plan and set goals you are always going to reach them? Perhaps we are trying to reach the wrong goals and we should be, "pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14)? Perhaps we are spending way too much time trying to reach financial goals, instead of reaching for spiritual

goals? Perhaps we should make a goal of reading our Bible everyday and actually doing what it says? Perhaps we should set a goal of throwing everything out of our churches, except the Bibles and just concentrate on preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? Perhaps we should make an outreach plan of finally telling someone the Gospel and nurturing them, instead of just talking about outreach and nurturing plans? Perhaps we spend way more time making outreach and nurturing plans, then we actually do performing any outreach? Perhaps some of what we call outreach, God calls a joke? Perhaps there have been so many stupid, idiotic outreach ideas that the world plugs its ears and spits us out of their mouths? Perhaps the only real outreach plan is to just open our mouth and share the Gospel?

Some would say, "As it says in Proverbs 20:18, 'Make plans by seeking advice.'" Perhaps we should finally get around to going to God's Word for advice? Perhaps the Bible has all the advice we will ever need and it is telling us to get off our lazy rear ends and proclaim the Gospel? Perhaps the best advice we could ever get is to, "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:1-3)? Perhaps clichés are really not all that effective, correct or significant? Perhaps many church growth heroes have actually been dismal failures? Perhaps we should do a study on how many church growth advocates have left the Lutheran Church?

Some would say, "The more lay leaders participate in the process the more enthusiastic they will be about the congregation's evangelism program." Have you ever experienced a time when you had so many lay leaders participating that the enthusiasm was dulled because too many people were pushing their own agenda? Have you ever been to a Council or Voters meeting that lasted for hours, upon endless hours, because more and more lay leaders thought they had to enthusiastically participate in the process, only to find you really did not accomplish anything? Have you ever heard of the saying, "There are too many cooks in the kitchen"? Or, "There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians?" Does anyone honestly believe that there is a church on the face of the earth that is run entirely by the pastor, unless of course it has no members? Has anyone been to a church where the lay people do not really care and would not do the work if

you begged them? Is there any empirical evidence that larger numbers of people equals more enthusiasm? I suppose it might be true about Rock concerts and Youth Group rallies, but is it really always true about evangelism programs? Could it be that the Gospel does not require our processes and programs, but proclamation?

Some would say, “Once a strategic plan for winning souls in the community has been developed, pastors and their lay leaders should test it for effectiveness.” The question is, just how does one test the plan for winning souls for effectiveness? As far as God is concerned, the only real test is whether or not they have faith in their hearts. Does this mean we are now supposed to play God and judge people’s hearts? Or should we give every person we witness to a test?

Perhaps we should give them a multiple choice test: A) I am a Christian. B) I am not a Christian. C) This test is stupid. D) I do not know if I am a Christian or not. E) I do not care if I am a Christian. F) Christians are morons for thinking they can effectively test a strategic plan for winning souls. G) All of the above. H) None of the above. I) The Gospel does not require our strategic plans or tests.

Some would say, “One should be able to identify what steps must be executed in order to meet the goals. This will give great confidence to those individuals who are participating in the outreach effort.” Ok, here goes. Step #1 Proclaim the Gospel. Step #2 Proclaim the Gospel. Step #3 Proclaim the Gospel. Step #4 Proclaim the Gospel. Is there some part of “proclaiming the Gospel” that you do not understand??? Do we have great confidence in the Gospel yet?

Some would say, “Confidence breeds success. That is the funny thing...” You can say that again! “That is the funny thing...” Could it be that the Gospel and Christ’s success is the only victory and triumph we need?

In Proverbs 16:9 it says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” In Proverbs 16:3 it says, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”? Which is it? Does the Lord simply “determine our steps” or does the Lord make “your plans succeed”? I do not think it can be both, can it? Or is there more to it than that?

What if the old saying, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail,” is wrong and we can do all the planning we want and the Lord determines that it is going to be a failure? Perhaps we should look at Job as the prime example of someone who made great plans and ended up being a dismal

failure through no fault of his own, got jerked around by his wife and friends, and still ended up smelling like a rose, all thanks to God with a little help from Satan? Perhaps, that is the problem? Perhaps, we are leaving God and Satan out of the picture and think that just because we waste endless hours making “plans” that we are going to be a success. When in reality God had things all “planned” a long time ago, like before the creation of the world? Maybe we are just mindless puppets on a string, being jerked around without any control over anything? Perhaps we are all on a giant roller coaster ride and cannot do anymore than hang on for the ride? Perhaps we are all sitting on top of a giant’s head and some day the giant is going to scratch... Or perhaps we can get carried away and the Gospel is what the ministry is all about?

Some would say, “Whatever plan the pastor and his congregation undertake, if it is successful, it is the one that should be followed.” If anyone thinks that the pastor and congregation should follow the plan that is a failure, please raise your right hand. If anyone thinks the Gospel is a dismal failure, please raise your left hand. If anyone thinks the Gospel is successful without buildings, programs and plans raise your voice against the arrogance, hypocrisy and man-centered “ministries” that are being created.

Genesis 1:1-2 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Acts 17:26, “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Mark 10:9, “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” 1 Corinthians 12:1-2, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-5, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:11, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.” Romans 13:1, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

What do all these verses have in common? God did it all. God created the world. God determines where we live. God prepares what works we are going to do. God joins us together with our

spouse. God gives us spiritual gifts as He determines. God gives us our body, both physical and spiritual. God established every governing authority.

Could it be that God really does not need our niggling tactics? Could it be that we could plan things until we are so stressed out from the details that we drive ourselves in the ground and God really has other plans for us? Could it be that God prepared our works in advance, so that we do not have to sit around and make up a bunch of new ones in order to please Him? Could it be that God's plan is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Could it be that every plan that is necessary is already found in the Bible? Could it be that God's plan is to preach, teach and administer the Sacraments? Could it be that God's plan is to be faithful to His Word? Could it be that we are so busy making plans that we miss the most important one – GO? Could it be the Gospel does not require a structure or plan or man's help at all?

Some would say, "It is also important that everyone is able to participate in the excitement." What if there is no excitement? What if the most exciting thing we do is preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? What if someone is going through chemo-therapy, throwing up and does not care one bit about your petty plans and only wants the comfort of the Gospel and not the shallow, trivial, cheerleader type excitement you think you have to offer? What if someone is on their death bed, gasping their last death rattle and might just roast in hell for all eternity if you fail to tell them the Gospel, because you are so giddy and excited about telling them all about your insignificant, inconsequential, trifling little plans?

There is a blond joke that goes like this: How do you kill a blond? Put a scratch and sniff sticker on the bottom of a pool and tell them to go sniff it. Is that stupid or what? Perhaps there is a better one that could go like this: How do you kill a Christian? You forget about the Gospel and get them all excited about your worthless, useless, hollow plans.

I know of one congregation that made 10,000 phone calls, spent \$4000.00 and made 5 mailings, with ZERO results. During that same time, one of the two pastors did something rather amazing. He shared the Gospel with others. God's results were 100%. You sure cannot beat those statistics! And guess what? You have God's guarantee that every, single, solitary time you proclaim the Gospel you will have results!!!

Some would say, “One key thing to remember about any plan is to keep it simple and short...” Ok, here is my plan: Step #1 Proclaim the Gospel. Is that short enough?

Some would say, “Whatever plan is devised, when the measuring period is finished, a debriefing should be conducted to determine what went right and what went wrong.” Awesome idea! When I get to heaven, the FIRST thing I am going to do is go to God for a debriefing. Do you think He might just say, “The only right thing you did was proclaim the Gospel.”? Or do you think He might just say, “What went wrong? Let me count the ways... Too many lame outreach programs; too much time was wasted with too many long winded plans; the only time you actually opened your mouth was during a planning meeting; all those brochures you stuck on doors because you were too afraid and lazy to actually talk to someone got stuck on the bottom of a bird cage; the WWJD thing – it was quite pedantic and all law and you cannot create and sustain faith without the Gospel; oh yah, the Gospel thing – I meant it.”

#10. Have a Great Vision. Dream Big Dreams.

Some would say, “No one wants to join a team that does not have big dreams.” Guess what? That is actually how we all happened to join God’s Church. God had big dreams. He dreamed about saving our miserable, wretched souls and it occurred. He dreamed about salvation and it happened. He dreamed about forgiveness and it came about. He dreamed about defeating sin, death, hell and satan and it worked. He dreamed about sharing His vision with the world and He did. Could it possibly be that our teeny, tiny little dreams and plans are utterly nothing compared to the magnificent dreams of God? Could it be that God lives in the heavens and laughs His head off at our brainless, diminutive dreams? Either that or cries?

Some would say, “There’s no incentive to join a team that does not have an exciting, grand vision of the future...” I am proud to say that I belong to God’s team and that God’s team does have an exciting, grand vision of the future, with His children living with Him forever in heaven!!! Why would anyone want to trade that exciting, grand vision for some puny, worthless, idiotic vision of nothingness?

In Isaiah 5:3-5 it says, “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done for My vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going

to do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.” Is it possible that we can dream all we want, but people still are not bearing fruit? Is it conceivable that even God has done all He can and when He looks for good grapes He finds only bad? Is it possible that God is standing by our hedges ready to destroy them, break them down and trample them?

In Proverbs 29:18 it says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Some would respond to that, “There’s simply nothing more important a leader can offer than an exciting vision for the future.” As a pastor I could not agree more!!! Without the Gospel the people perish. That is why I get so incredibly excited and enthusiastic about stepping up into the pulpit and sharing the most exciting vision for the future that could possibly exist – the exciting vision of God’s people having their tears wiped away, living with God in heaven, being His people and Him being our God. Personally, I cannot even come close to a vision that is more exciting than that. Why would you want to exchange God’s incredibly awesome vision of heaven for some pitiful, powerless, pathetic vision based on some arrogant visualization of yourself?

Some would say, “It is the dream that inspires them [the people] to work long hours and to take bold steps for the Lord.” Again, I could not agree more!!! God’s dream, the Gospel, is a fabulously powerful inspiration, that moves people to be hung on the cross, burned at the stake, sawed in two, put up with eighteen years of foolish, inane ideas pouring out the minds of a few frivolous time wasters who are so self-centered and proud that they actually think they are doing God a favor by coming up with even more absurd dreams.

Some would say, “If pastors and their congregations are going to effectively reach out to the lost, they need to dream big dreams that will inspire others.” Once again, this is right on the money!!! The only way we can ever reach out to the lost is through the big dream of the Gospel, that inspires our hearts through the love of Christ and His forgiveness that cleanses us from all sins. Perhaps many churches are dying, because they are not effectively reaching out to the lost with the big dream of the Gospel that is the only true inspiration? Perhaps many churches are dying, because they have replaced the big dream of the Gospel with their own childish inspirations?

Some would say, “If pastors and lay leaders work hard and long and do lots of things right, they can expect the Lord to bless their efforts far beyond their greatest expectations.” If pastors and

lay leaders work hard and long preaching and teaching the Gospel they can most definitely expect the Lord to bless their efforts far beyond their greatest expectations!!! But could it be that we have replaced the Gospel with what we dream are the right things? Could it be that we are working hard and long creating an artificial ministry that is devoid of the true power of God? Could it be that God is not blessing our efforts, because we are working hard pushing our own schemes, relying on fluff instead of the real stuff, ignoring the Gospel in favor of our paltry methods? Could it be that God is not blessing our efforts, because we are so full of ourselves, so filled with arrogance and pride, so self-centered and egotistical that the sound of our own horns is blasting out the sound of the precious Gospel?

Some would say, “Pastors can help create exhilaration by offering a vision for the future that energizes members and lay leaders.” I feel myself tingling all over, all because of the vision of the Gospel, the vision of heaven, the vision of resting in the arms of Jesus, the vision of our tears being wiped away, the vision of spending eternity in Paradise, the vision of being reunited with fellow believers, the vision of perfect peace. In fact, exhilaration is too small a word. Perhaps ecstasy or rapture would be a better way to think about it?

Some would say, “When we lift our vision we acknowledge his greatness.” Dear God I lift the vision of the Gospel to Your glory, acknowledging Your greatness, Your power, Your authority, Your forgiveness, mercy, love and salvation in Jesus Christ. I must decrease, so that You can increase. I lower the flag of my own conceit and haughtiness. I lower the sound of my own trumpet, so the sweet melody of the Gospel can sound forth in complete clarity and beauty and peace. I consider everything I think as rubbish, compared to the surpassing greatness of Your Gospel message, that is the very power of salvation for everyone who believes. I fully acknowledge that the Gospel does not need anything we have to offer, except proclamation. Amen.

#11. Communicate Clearly and Passionately

Some would say, “There is no amount of talent, expertise, energy, skill, or intelligence that can substitute for a passionate commitment.” I am sure there are some who will condemn me for the passionate disposition of this publication. I tend to get rather passionate after I have been hurt a number of times. I have been rear ended four times. When I look in my rear view mirror and see

a car coming too fast and too close I have tendency to wince. Because of my experiences I am infinitely passionate about **focusing** on Christ. My question is, are you passionately committed to Christ? Are you passionately committed to the Gospel? Are you passionately committed to preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? Are you passionately committed to your own passionate commitments? Are you passionately committed to your own talent, expertise, energy, skill and intelligence? Are you substituting a passionate commitment for worldly things for a passionate commitment to heavenly things? Are you substituting a passionate commitment for material things for a passionate commitment to spiritual things?

Some would say, “Not dissimilar to a sermon, there are four elements to a good fund raising letter—attention, problem, solution, close the sale... I do not pretend to have any understanding or insight into homiletics... Good sermons seem to have these basic elements.” Could it be there is a wrong focus on what determines a good sermon, if we are focused on fund raising? Could it be that a good sermon is really one that faithfully proclaims Law and Gospel? Could it be that a good sermon is really one that is so utterly clear with the Gospel that the power of God is creating, sustaining and strengthening faith? Could it be that our opinion of what makes a good sermon and what God knows is a good sermon are two different things? Could it be that an awesome sermon is one preached by a dull, boring, fat old man who clearly and faithfully proclaims the precious love and forgiveness of Christ and that a lousy, horrid sermon is a pretty boy preacher, wearing all the latest liturgical paraphernalia, pointing to his PowerPoint presentation, addressing all the comfortable sinners sitting in padded pews, capturing their attention, quickly, clearly, accurately and with emotion describing the problem, in a simple, straightforward way explaining how to solve the problem and finally telling them exactly what he wants them to do and why it is so important, but forgetting Christ? Could it be that a good sermon gets your attention by telling you what a miserable, wretched, puking, pathetic, slimy worm and maggot you really are and how even the righteous things you do are like a dirty, filthy rag; telling you how Christ has saved your dismal, pitiful soul by making you completely and entirely holy through His precious blood that cleanses us from every sin; telling you to get up off your now holy, precious tail and live in that holiness in all you do and quit worrying about how clever you can be with all your marketing gimmicks? Could it be that God did not put any

formulas or elements in the Bible for preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, except His precious, beloved and highly effective Law and Gospel formula?

Some would say, “If the sermon does not grab the attention of the folks in the pew from the very beginning, all that follows, no matter how good, has been wasted.” Could it be that God is a big, fat liar when He said in Isaiah 55:10-11, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”?

Could it be that the real waste is all of the silly, ridiculous, off base and dead wrong marketing principles that are being substituted for the only genuine power we have to save lost souls? Could it be that God’s Word is capable of creating, sustaining and strengthening faith, even in the hearts of those who are in the womb (like John the Baptist), infants (like the ones we baptize), in a coma (like the ones we minister to in the hospitals), those having physical and mental impairments (like those we serve with the Gospel in nursing homes) and even those who are half asleep in those padded pews? Could it be that the problem is not because the sermon did not grab their attention, but because they are too busy sinfully staring at the sexy rear end in front of them, or lusting over the scantily dressed sweetie beside them, or too distracted by their pager vibrating in their pocket, or reading the bulletin instead of listening, or too doped up from the party, drugs and/or booze from the night before, or just walked through the door after being screamed at and abused by their spouse, or are surrounded by squirmy, noisy, distracting children, or too busy making plans for the next outreach seminar they are going to attend or teach? Perhaps God wants faith and our attention to be **focused** on the Gospel?

Some would say, “Urge them to take specific action. If the sermon sends parishioners on their way without a specific charge to... Parishioners will leave the worship service either emotionally charged, indifferent and unmoved, or simply relieved that it is over.” Or could it be that they might leave with their faith created, sustained or strengthened through the power of the Gospel? Could it be, if a pastor gives a simple Law and Gospel message, without adding a bunch of tangential twaddle, people might just go home comforted, strengthened, at peace with God and man, living a life of faith, holiness, perfection and joy in Christ?

1 Peter 4:11 says, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very Words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” What happens when we change the **focus** from “speaking the very Words of God” to, “The fact is that the sermon on Sunday morning is the primary factor in determining whether a visitor will return. If the pastor is unprepared, if the delivery is flat and unemotional, if the content is disorganized, forget it”? Perhaps the tired, old, boring, close to retirement pastor, who is speaking the very Words of God, with the strength God provides, is giving just as much glory to God as the handsome, striking, talented, dynamic, charismatic, emotional, organized pastor? Perhaps, the power of the very Words of God are just as powerful, just as effective, will not return empty, will accomplish what God desires, whether the sermon is organized or disorganized, boring or exciting, moving or dispassionate? Perhaps the only ineffective Law/Gospel, Christ centered sermon is the one that is not preached at all? Perhaps if more sermons were the very Words of God, done with the strength God provides and less sermons were done with the focus on being primed, lively, poignant and controlled, then God would be praised through Jesus Christ?

Some would say, “Certainly if the angels in heaven are rejoicing over a soul that is saved, a messenger of the Gospel should be in a joyful state as he goes about sharing the Good News.” Perhaps the angels do not have lumbago, take drugs for cholesterol, blood thinning, heart pain, diabetes, do not have poor eyesight or limited hearing, do not have corns on the toes, ulcers from too much planning, dizziness from organizing a sermon, headaches from sitting through too many meetings, diverticulitis, sleep apnea or nausea from listening to whiny members tell them how rotten the sermons were? Perhaps the power of the Gospel to create, sustain and strengthen faith has absolutely, positively nothing to do with our “joyful state”? Perhaps the Good News is so Good, because it has nothing to do with the messenger? Perhaps members and visitors should take a chill pill and quite worrying about whether their pastor is shockingly eloquent and start singing the praises of God when he is actually more like St. Paul who said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a

demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Perhaps more people would be believers if we were pushing the Gospel and not pushing faith in the pastor's eloquence?

Some people would tie together Proverbs 25:11, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." with, "That is how important the delivery of the sermon really is." Could it be they are confusing "delivery" with "a word aptly spoken"? Perhaps aptly means appropriately, fittingly, suitably, rightly, pertinently, and not eloquently, expressively, with feeling, powerfully, movingly? Perhaps anytime God's Word is aptly spoken it is like apples of gold in settings of silver, whether it is by a boring, dull speaker or a forceful, effective speaker?

Some would say, "What should the minimum standard be for the quality of sermons? At the very minimum, parishioners have a right to expect a sermon on Sunday morning that is logical, well-organized, understandable and that is delivered with passionate conviction." Perhaps the only "right" a parishioner has is to sit down, shut up, listen and believe that God's Word is effective in their hearts? Perhaps pastors the world over could write, logical, well-organized, understandable, delivered with passionate conviction sermons every single Sunday, but not one single soul is saved or helped in any way, because it is not faithful to God's Word? Perhaps God is the One who sets the minimum standard for the quality of sermons and He said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

Perhaps, if a sermon does not seem understandable, it is because the parishioner has so neglected God's Word that they are totally out of touch with reality? Perhaps, if a sermon does not seem logical, it is because things like the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the virgin birth, Law and Gospel are not logical and do not require logic but faith? Perhaps, parishioners are confusing passionate conviction with fleshly arousal? Perhaps, if a sermon does not seem well-organized, it is because God's Word is not always very well organized either (when was the last time you tried to put together a harmony of the Gospels)?

Some would say, “The standard for attention and comprehension should not be the most Biblically knowledgeable member of the congregation, but rather the first time visitor.” What if the visitor is a PhD? What if the visitor is a rocket scientist? What if the visitor has an IQ of 10? What if the visitor is an infant or baby in the womb? What if the visitor has Alzheimer’s or some other form of dementia? Perhaps the “standard for attention and comprehension” should be based on the power of God’s Word and His promise from Isaiah 55:11, “so is My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Perhaps God’s Word is powerful enough to affect babies in the womb, infants, toddlers, youth, young adults, adults and senior citizens? Perhaps God’s Word is powerful enough to affect the rocket scientist and the person with an IQ of 10 at the same time? Perhaps the “standard for attention and comprehension” should be God’s standard and not ours?

Some would say, “Seekers do not make their decision to come back based on deep theological issues. Rather, they make their decision on the most superficial first impression they have.” Perhaps churches should throw out the superficial garbage, the things that make the church attractive, the fake, smiley, planted, pseudo friendly members and just concentrate on strong Biblical messages based on the strength of the Gospel? Perhaps seekers should not make their decisions based on deep theological issues or superficial things, but should return because of faith created through the Gospel? Perhaps there is already too much competition between churches that are drawing people in through superficial claptrap and we should quit competing and just stick with preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? Perhaps the reason so many churches are failing is because they spend way too much time concentrating on surface hogwash and not enough time on preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments? Perhaps the best thing we could do would be to strip all the churches of every teeny, tiny bit of artificial, superficial drivel or tear them all down and just meet in homes and concentrate on preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments?

Have you ever noticed what happens to some of the Mom and Pop stores, when the big giants move into town? They shut down in a hurry. They cannot compete. Are the big giants giving better service, better quality merchandise, building solid, meaningful relationships? Have you ever noticed what happens to some of the little churches, when the mega-churches move into town? They start losing members and money and dwindle into nothingness. They cannot

compete. Are the mega-churches giving better service, better quality merchandise, building solid, meaningful relationships? Perhaps if every church would simply concentrate on the Gospel and faith, like they should, there would be no competition!

Have you ever heard anyone arguing about the superiority of fast food restaurants, over a good home cooked meal? Do the fast food restaurants have better service, better quality food and build solid, meaningful relationships? Have you ever noticed what happens when the mega-churches move into town? Do they have better service, better quality food and build solid, meaningful relationships? Or is it mostly sugary desserts and fast food? Perhaps if every church would simply concentrate on the Gospel and faith, like they should, there would be no competition and no concern about the loss of nutrition!

In Matthew 23:1-7 it says, “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them Rabbi.’”

Could it be that our churches are now the modern day seats for the teachers of the law and the Pharisees? Could it be that we do not practice what we preach? Could it be that we are tying up heavy loads and putting them on pastor’s shoulders, but not willing to lift a finger to help them? Could it be that everything we do is done for men to see and not to the glory of God? Could it be that we are making our phylacteries wide and the tassels long, by trying to surpass the churches around us, with more, new and improved programs, outreach, groups, boards, meetings, seminars or the most eloquent preacher? Could it be that we are so busy building monuments to our own pride that we have forgotten about who Christ is and what He is all about?

In Philippians 3:18-21 it says, “For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is

in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

Could it be that we are clearly communicating our love for worldly things, instead of our love for heavenly things? Could it be that we have taken in too many members who live as enemies of the cross of Christ? Could it be that too many people have their mind on earthly things, instead of heavenly things? Could it be that we are so focused on our earthly citizenship and our status before men, that we do not care about our heavenly citizenship and our status before God? Could it be that we want to control things so much, that we do not care about Christ and His power that enables Him to bring everything under His control? Could it be that we are so in love with this lowly earthly body, that we forget that Christ is going to transform them so that they will be like His glorious body? Could it be that we are so earthly minded that we are no heavenly good?

Some would quote the late Dr. Walter A. Maier who said, “I must help maintain high standards for the highest profession on earth.” The late, great Dr. Walter A. Maier, the founder and first speaker on the “Lutheran Hour” died in 1950, but I did know the present Dr. Walter A. Maier III personally. I even had him for a class in the seminary, and he and his father did help maintain high standards for pastors. Both the Maier’s were/are “gifted” speakers, but perhaps it might be safe to say that both of them would be the first to admit that even on their best day of preaching, it was only as good as the Gospel it contained? Perhaps it might be safe to say that both these gifted speakers would agree that they have not converted anyone, but God has done it all? Perhaps it might be safe to say that both these gifted speakers were given the gift of speaking by God and helped pastors “hone” their preaching skills and helped maintain high standards for pastors by stressing the Gospel? Perhaps it might be safe to say that both these gifted speakers would stand up in defense of the not so gifted speaking pastors who are still lifting high the cross of Jesus Christ from whence cometh our help?

Some would say, “Pastors and their lay leaders should regularly assess the effectiveness of sermons in conveying God’s Good News to the lost.” Perhaps pastors and lay leaders should not try to play God? Perhaps pastors and lay leaders could not “assess the effectiveness of sermons” even if they tried, because they cannot see into people’s hearts? Perhaps pastors and lay leaders are so busy assessing the sermons that they are not listening to what they have to say? Perhaps

pastors and lay leaders are so busy assessing the sermons for effectiveness, eloquence, organization, passionate conviction, logic and understandability that they do not give a hoot about God's Good News? Perhaps pastors and lay leaders have long forgotten, that any time the Gospel is being conveyed, it is effectively reaching the lost? Perhaps too many pastors are being destroyed by the arrogant who think they can assess the effectiveness of sermons?

Some would say, "The criterion for determining if sermons are hitting the mark is given quite simply in the 14th chapter of Acts, which describes the impact of Paul and Barnabas, 'There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.'" That is the bottom line. Are sermons reaching the lost and touching the hearts and minds of every member?"

Perhaps some people quit reading too soon, because it did not take long before the bottom line changed drastically. In the rest of the verses following Acts 14:2-7, it says, "But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the Good News."

Perhaps their message was effective and a great number believed, because they were proclaiming the effective Good News? Perhaps there are so many lay people and others stirring up the churches and poisoning minds against the brothers today, that they are driving people away? Perhaps pastors are speaking boldly for the Lord, and God is even confirming the message of His grace, but people are divided and some are plotting to mistreat pastors, in spite of the bold sermons? Perhaps it is time to flee to the surrounding country and simply continue to preach the Good News? Perhaps the bottom line is to preach the Good News and leave the rest up to God?

#12. Add Members. Keep Them.

There is an hypothetical situation about two surgical doctors. One is pleasant but inept. The other is unlikable but an expert. Which one would you pick to do your surgery? Some would answer, "Neither, we should demand both pleasant and expert." Perhaps they mean we should keel over

and die, because perhaps in the real world, we do not have that many choices in doctors or pastors? Perhaps pastors are neither doctors nor surgeons and this entire argument is ridiculous? Perhaps what we would like and what we are going to get are two different things? Perhaps we are selfish and greedy and judgmental and not even Christ would make us happy?

Some would say, “We should never settle for mediocrity in any area!” Perhaps it is not really settling for mediocrity, if the entire **focus** is the message and not the messenger? Can you imagine what the critics would have been writing about John the Baptist and his clothes made of camel’s hair, the leather belt around his waist and food of locusts and wild honey? Perhaps God was being obtuse when, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.”? (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) Maybe St. Paul was stupid when he said in 1 Timothy 1:15-17, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Or in Romans 7:21-25 when he said, “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!”

Perhaps it is God who did not settle for mediocrity by sending His beloved Son to cleanse us from every sin and make us holy and perfect in every way? Perhaps we are looking inside of ourselves, instead of looking to Christ and His blood that cleanses us, for the lack of mediocrity? Perhaps if we applied the blood of Christ to ourselves and pastors we would not be quite as mediocre anymore? Perhaps the Gospel’s power is effective whether we are mediocre or not?

Some would say, “If a congregation has the Gospel in its truth and purity, but fails to deliver it in a clear, caring, Christ-like manner (corporately and individually), it is unrealistic to expect prospects to become members and to continue as active members.”

Perhaps the problem is not with the Gospel, but with the fact that we are only looking for members? Perhaps the problem is, whenever we are Christ-like, people reject us just like others rejected Christ? Perhaps the problem with being Christ-like is that it includes telling people they are sinful, evil and wicked, white washed tombs and broods of vipers and that really turns them off? Perhaps the problem is that we are so intent on making “active members” that we forget about making disciples? Perhaps God does not give a hoot about members and memberships, active or otherwise, and all He cares about is faith expressing itself in love? Perhaps we have put the emphasis on “active members” for so long and built up such a huge earthly empire of “active members” that we have lost sight of citizens for God’s kingdom, children of God, heirs of eternal life, saints in the kingdom of light? Perhaps things are so out of control that the only way to reverse the trend is to close every single church and simply go and make disciples by preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments?

Some would say, “If we are not meeting their [those we seek to save] needs for Christian fellowship, for spiritual growth, for nurturing, for caring and concern, they will be gone before we know it.” Perhaps that is the problem all along – we are not meeting their needs, because we are ignoring the Gospel? Perhaps the needs of Christian fellowship, spiritual growth, nurturing, caring and concern cannot happen in a corporate, business environment? Perhaps we do not have a clue what needs they really have, but just have the attitude, “build it and they will come”? Perhaps we are so wrapped up in our artificial “ministries” that we have no clue what Christ and the Gospel are all about? Perhaps we have never taken the time to sit down with anyone, to see what their needs really are, because we are too busy meeting their needs artificially? Perhaps what God has given us to fulfill those needs and what we think we need to fulfill those needs are two different things?

Some would say, “When hurting souls walk through the front door they need real, genuine help and compassion. Consistent with scripture, they need opportunities for spiritual growth, Christian fellowship and relationship building that may come from a couples’ club or a ladies’ circle or a youth group.”

Could it be that “genuine help and compassion” does not always come from a couples’ club or a ladies circle or a youth group? Could it be that sometimes couples’ clubs have no spiritual value at all, because all they do is entertain themselves? Could it be that some ladies’ circles have only

served as vicious gossip clusters? Could it be that some youth groups have at times contributed more to the denigration of the youth, instead of giving the genuine help they needed, because all they cared about were fun and games or lust? Could it be that genuine help and compassion comes from Christian fellowship and relationship building that comes from Christians getting together for worship and Bible studies and not entertainment? Could it be that some couples' clubs, ladies' circles and youth groups are more inconsistent with Scripture than consistent? When hurting souls walk through the front door, could it be we are hurting them even more by offering them artificial groups, groups and more groups and not the genuine help and compassion that comes through the Scriptures? Could it be that we are so enamored with our synthetic clubs, circles and groups that we are not helping the hurting but harming even more? Could it be that we are trying to be so trendy that we are no longer being consistent with Scripture? Could it be that true spiritual growth only comes when people are genuinely loving one another and in the Word?

Some would say, "They [the hurting souls walking through the front door] need to feel welcome and needed in the community of believers." Perhaps we are trying to put those hurting souls into the community of believers before they are a believer? Perhaps those hurting souls are hurting because they need to repent and we want to usher them into the community of God before they are ready and willing to do that? Perhaps the community of believers that some talk about is really a straw man we have built to our own glory and the real community of believers is all those true believers that live out their lives every day by faith in Christ and in His holiness?

Some would say, "Participating in a Bible information or instruction class needs to be a stimulating, interesting, and energizing experience." Perhaps we should quit catering to the flesh and start catering to the soul? Perhaps every Bible class is stimulating, interesting and energizing just by its very nature, because it is God's Word. Perhaps, because of our sinful nature we are rebelling against that experience? Perhaps people need to participate less and sit and listen and obey God's Word more? Perhaps we need less Bible "information" classes and more Bible classes? Perhaps we need less information and more faith? Perhaps we need less instructions and more Gospel and faith? Perhaps we do not need earthly information and instructions at all, but we need Christ and everything He teaches and commands? Perhaps we just need to go and make disciples?

Some would say, “The story of our living God is an exciting one.” Perhaps it is more than a story? Perhaps it is more than exciting? Perhaps it is the very Words of God, that bring us life and salvation, power and authority over satan, demons, death and hell? Perhaps we are too hell bent on exciting ourselves and not excited enough about heaven and Jesus and God’s Word? Perhaps we just want our pastors to tell us stories about God, so that we do not have to take God’s Word seriously? Perhaps our living God wants to give us heavenly life, but we are too excited about our earthly life?

Some would say, “...a program that involves the participants is critical. A lecture will simply not suffice.” Perhaps this statement is absolutely wrong? Perhaps some people do not want to participate? Perhaps we do not need programs at all? Perhaps we do not need participants at all? Perhaps the only thing that is critical is that we get God’s Word correct? Perhaps preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments is what is critical? Perhaps proclaiming God’s Word is what is critical, because God’s Word does not require “participation” it requires faith, which requires no “participation” on our part? Perhaps the type of participation God thinks is critical is called “fruits of faith” and not joining some kind of “Country Club” for God?

Some would say, “Once seekers see the relevance of God in their life, they too will be excited about God’s word and sharing the good news with others.” Perhaps there is no such thing as “seekers”, because God’s Word says in Romans 3:10-18, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Perhaps faith has less to do with seeing the “relevance of God in their life” and more to do with God’s Spirit working in our lives? Perhaps faith has less to do with being “excited” and more to do with trusting and obeying? Perhaps God does not want us to be excited about His Word, so much as He wants us to be changed by His Word? Perhaps the Good News has less to do with “the relevance of God in their life” and more to do with what Christ did for us? Perhaps the Good News is Gospel and not Law?

Some would say, “Pastors and their lay leaders should regularly evaluate the atmosphere in their congregation.” Perhaps they should evaluate whether or not they are truly proclaiming God’s Word? Perhaps they should evaluate whether they value earthly things or heavenly things more? Perhaps they should evaluate their own hearts and see if they have faith or not? Perhaps they should stop evaluating altogether and just rely on God’s Word? Perhaps God is more interested in whether we have faith and love, than in what kind of atmosphere we have?

Some would say, “In the WELS we are blessed with the true Gospel, and that gives us a great edge.” Could it be that it gives us more than an “edge”? Could it be that it gives us the very power, authority and victory of Christ over sin, death, satan and hell? Could it be that it gives us salvation, eternal life, holiness, a new life with God? Could it be the very power of God to create, sustain and strengthen faith? Could it be that the Gospel is not an “edge” at all, but an open door to heaven? Could it be that God is insulted when we refer to the Gospel as an “edge” and not salvation in Christ? Could it be that too many people are on edge, because they are relying too much on earthly things and outward appearances and arrogance and not enough on the Gospel?

Could it be that Christ was right when He said in Colossians 2:20-23, “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’ These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” Could it be that too many people are on edge because of the basic principles of this world, its rules, human commands and teachings? Could all of these pastoral leadership, hard learned lessons, have an appearance of wisdom, but they are nothing more than self-imposed worship, false humility and the harsh treatment of pastors?

Some would say, “If new converts do not find our fellowship to be alive and vibrant, they can and will look elsewhere.” Could it be that we are training new converts in how to indulge in the sinful nature, how to pick a church based on padded pews and creature comforts, and not based on faith created through the Gospel? Could it be that this statement sounds more like someone picking out new carpeting or choosing their favorite restaurant, based on feelings, perceptions and fleshly desires, instead of basing any decisions on the Word of God? Could it be, if new

converts do not find our fellowship to be alive and vibrant, it is because we have stopped proclaiming the Gospel? Could it be that true fellowship has nothing to do with being “alive and vibrant” and everything to do with faith in Christ, created through the Gospel? Could it be our fellowship is not “alive and vibrant” because we have stopped sharing the love of Christ?

Some would say, “The truth of what we preach must be equaled by the way we act and treat those who have joined our fellowship.” In James 2:14-19 it says, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” Perhaps it is correct that we should practice what we preach? Perhaps we are treating those who have joined our fellowship completely wrong? Perhaps we are treating those who have joined our fellowship as if all they care about are the superficial things of this world and not heavenly things? Perhaps we are treating them to potlucks, vegetable movies and AAL insurance, when we should be treating them with the Gospel? Perhaps we are treating them with exploitation and management skills instead of love?

#13. Insist on Accountability

Some would say, “As the spiritual leader of the congregation, the pastor makes many critical decisions.” Perhaps as the spiritual leader, the pastor should not make any decisions, he should just uphold the Word of God? Perhaps as the spiritual leader, the pastor should not be making any decisions, since God has already made them for us? Perhaps the only spiritual decision a pastor should ever make is to preach, teach and administer the Sacraments?

Some would say, “Nine times out of ten, or perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred, members will follow the pastor’s lead.” Perhaps that is the way it should be? Perhaps pastors should be leading the members with God’s Word? Perhaps the members should be following the lead of the pastor 100% of the time? Perhaps the pastor should never ask his members to do anything Christ would not ask them to do? Perhaps the pastor should lead the people by preaching,

teaching and administering the Sacraments? Perhaps the pastor should lead by the love of Christ? Perhaps the pastor should lead the people to rip out all the extraneous gobbledygook and concentrate 100% on God's Word?

Some would say, "Pastors, like the rest of us, are not infallible." Perhaps that is why they need Christ too? Perhaps that is why people should think twice about writing articles on business principles and anything else that is man-centered and encourage their pastor and others with the mercy, grace and forgiveness of Christ? Perhaps lay people are not infallible either and that is why the pastor needs to concentrate solely on the Gospel? Perhaps the Gospel is the pith, the core, the quintessence of the entire ministry and is not reliant on whether the pastor is fallible or infallible? Perhaps, it is because pastors and lay people alike are not infallible and that it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of God.

Some would say, "My advice to pastors is to seek accountability." Perhaps the pastor is already held accountable by a much higher Power than any man-made council? In Romans 3:19-20 it says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Perhaps all of us are already being held accountable by God? Perhaps the only accountability we need is found in God's Word? Perhaps if we switched from a business oriented ministry, to a Bible centered, Christ centered ministry, we would not need councils and man centered accountability, because we would already be living according to God's Word?

Some would say, "Real leaders welcome accountability because they know they do not have all the good ideas and they also know they cannot get the job done alone." Perhaps real leaders would not need to keep coming up with any ideas at all, if they concentrated on a Word and Sacrament ministry? Perhaps real leaders already know that they cannot get the job done alone and that is why they rely completely on God and His Word? Perhaps real leaders welcome accountability, because they know they stand accountable to God and they know that God forgives them, unlike too many laypeople who stand in bitter judgment against the pastor? Perhaps pastors are afraid of man-made accountability, because they have been burned so many

times by hypercritical, negative, condemnatory people and they are sick and tired of the abuse? Perhaps there is a difference between legalistic accountability and sharing suggestions – and too many people cannot see the difference? Perhaps if you look up the meaning of accountable you will find that it means “blamed” and pastors are sick and tired of being blamed and having no one to blame but themselves? Perhaps pastors know they are answerable, responsible, liable, accountable only to God’s Word and are mighty, awful exhausted from all the synthetic policies and sets of man-made laws?

Some would say, “It is very difficult to learn and grow if one is unwilling to become vulnerable to others.” Perhaps the problem is that we are no longer vulnerable to God and that is why we are not growing? Perhaps vulnerable means defenseless, helpless, in danger, at risk and pastors are queasy and fatigued from all the pastor abusers who ambush them with secret meetings, personal vendettas and legalistically pushed industry points of reference? Perhaps learning and growth comes from being in God’s Word on a continual basis and has nothing to do with becoming vulnerable to others? Perhaps others are just as fallible as the pastor and the pastor has no intention or desire to be vulnerable to sinful human beings, especially when he has a perfect and holy God he can go to?

Some would say, “It is in this state of vulnerability that real transfer of wisdom occurs.” Perhaps real wisdom comes from God and God alone? According to Genesis 3:6, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” Perhaps the kind of wisdom that comes from vulnerability is the same kind of wisdom that Eve was pursuing? Perhaps the wisest of all people are also the most humble and loving?

Proverbs 4:6-7 says, “Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.” Perhaps most pastors prefer to get their wisdom from God, because they know that kind of wisdom will protect them, while the wisdom that comes from vulnerability will attack them? James 3:17 says, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Perhaps pastors prefer the wisdom that comes from heaven, because it is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit

and is impartial – while the wisdom that comes from vulnerability is impure, war-mongering, divisive, thoughtless, assertive, full of hate, rotten fruit and biased?

Some would say, “After pastors have gone through the performance review process several times they will find that they will look forward to the opportunity to receive honest counsel from laymen.” Or perhaps the opposite is true – they will learn to dread them, because they are not receiving honest counsel from laymen, but personal opinions, condemnation, vile attacks and the evil eye from cranky old men and/or women?

I once read where some prisoners of war were beaten every day. After awhile they quit fighting the beatings and became submissive. They were broken, defeated and had no more energy to struggle. Perhaps that is the way some pastors are, because they have been beaten for so long and so hard that they have given up? I have known about cases where some women have been raped so many times they took up prostitution because it was safer and profitable. Perhaps some pastors have been raped so many times by hateful members, that they are prostituting themselves with the adulteress, idolatrous lay people who worship their own ideas and principles because they think it is safer and more profitable?

Some would say, “It is human nature to respond defensively to criticism?” And, “Perhaps it will help to look upon a criticism as an opportunity.” Although this publication is not specifically meant to be any explicit criticism directed at any one person, I still pray that some would see it as an opportunity to repent and **focus** on Christ.

On the other hand, perhaps we tell people that self-defense against criticism and bodily harm is permissible because otherwise they might end up being destroyed? Perhaps it would be wonderful if we could spend more time defending the Bible and less time having to defend ourselves from critical Christians? Perhaps we need more opportunities to hear God’s Word and less opportunities to sit through endless, critical meetings, listening to self-important, puffed up lay people banter on forever about their favorite topics?

Perhaps there is no room for “criticism” within the church? Perhaps there is nothing wrong with being defensive about criticism, because “criticism” is a sin? Perhaps St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:20, “We want to avoid any criticism...” because criticism is bad? Perhaps God would prefer us to, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke

and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2)? Perhaps the problem is that people have been too critical for too long? Perhaps the problem is too many pastors and lay people have been living according to their critical human nature for too long? Perhaps too many pastors cannot remember the last time they were encouraged? Perhaps God is asking us to love instead of criticizing?

Some would say, “A pastor who is strong and confident enough to undertake this process has the makings of a leader.” Perhaps Jesus was not much of a leader when He prayed, “Father, it if be Thy will take this cup from Me.”? Perhaps Jesus was not much of a leader when He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Perhaps more pastors are undergoing the process of layman abuse, because they are willing to say, “Not my will, but Thy will be done.”? Perhaps pastors are looking forward to hearing the Lord say to them in heaven, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”?

In Matthew 7:21-23 it says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’”

Perhaps some laypeople are deluding themselves into believing they are doing God’s will by pushing all their petty, hollow, business agendas, but will find Jesus telling them on Judgment Day, “I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!”? Perhaps some members in mega-churches are hoodwinked into having faith in prophecies, exorcisms and miracles, instead of Christ, and will find themselves cast into the lake of burning sulfur?

Some would say, “Pastors are the spiritual leaders of their congregations, and whether they like it or not are the ones who will be identified with the success or failure of their congregation’s evangelism, spiritual growth, and member retention efforts.” Maybe it is a sin for people to be so judgmental and whether they like it or not they will be judged accordingly on Judgment Day? Maybe it is a sin to identify the pastors with success or failure, because we should be relying on God’s success and when we get to heaven we will find out just how true that is? Perhaps the reason so many churches are failures is because the pastors are trying to be the spiritual leader

using unspiritual tools, like business principles? Perhaps the reason so many mega-churches are successful is because they are misled by pastors who are pushing prophesy, exorcism and miracles in the Name of Jesus, and they will end up in the lake of fire?

Some would say, “Of course, even if pastors and their members build a mega-church they have still accomplished nothing.” Perhaps the only thing I can think of to say is, “of course”!!!

Some would say, “It is God who has generously given pastors the intellect, drive, personality, and all their talents and abilities. As it says in the 2nd chapter of Philippians, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Perhaps intellect, drive, personality, talents and abilities have nothing to do with God’s good purpose? Perhaps even babies in the womb, new born infants, toddlers and even those with mental and physical challenges are acting according to God’s good purpose? Perhaps God’s good purpose has to do with His good and perfect will as found in the Scriptures? Perhaps God’s holiness is His good purpose and not all of our laughable ideas about how a church should be run? Perhaps we have been confusing intellect, drive, personality, talents and abilities with the will of God for so long that we are blinded by our own genius or stupidity?

Some would say, “It is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who will be there, using you as His instrument to save souls for eternity.” Perhaps it will be the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all working together, in harmony and unity? Perhaps the Holy Spirit does not use us to save souls, but He uses us to proclaim the Gospel which saves souls?

Hebrews 10:28-30 says, “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Matthew 12:31-32 says, “And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” Ephesians 4:30-31 says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Perhaps some have been grieving, insulting and blaspheming the Holy Spirit so long, with all of their man-made, self-absorbed, earthly dreams and pastor abuse that they will not be forgiven?

Some would say, “I would suggest that every pastor in every congregation needs to find out how he is doing.” Perhaps every pastor should spend every day in God’s Word to see how he is

doing? Perhaps if every pastor asked every layman how they were doing, every layman would give them a different answer and it would be so confusing that it would be futile? Perhaps every pastor should ask their mother how they are doing, because mothers have a tendency to be brutally honest while still loving you? In 1 John 3:19-20 it says, “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.” Perhaps only God’s opinion really matters and He says we have been made holy and perfect through the precious blood of Christ?

Some would say, “Pastors should be comforted and encouraged by the words of Proverbs 15:22 – Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” Perhaps that is Law and not Gospel and not very comforting or encouraging at all? Perhaps it is a command from God and not meant to be a Gospel encouragement? Perhaps if more pastors were comforted and encouraged by the Gospel, instead of condemned by the counsel of too many negative advisers they would succeed? Perhaps too many lay people have too high of an opinion of themselves as advisers and counselors, and pastors should seek the counsel and advice of God who can comfort and encourage them through the Gospel?

#14. Leadership. It Is A Journey, Not A Destination.

Some would say, “The bad news is that no pastor will ever build the perfect congregation.” Perhaps that is not bad news at all? Perhaps it will drive us to the Gospel, where we find that it is God who builds the perfect Church through Christ’s perfection? Perhaps it never has been and never will be the pastors job to build the perfect congregation? Perhaps we are wasting so much time trying to build the perfect, artificial congregation and earthly kingdom, that we neglect Christ’s heavenly kingdom and the perfection of Christ that makes us faultless?

Some would say, “But once a pastor is no longer burdened by reasons for failure, it will be like opening a door to fresh air and fresh ideas.” Perhaps that is what the Gospel is all about? Perhaps the Gospel is the only thing that can free us from the burden of failures? Perhaps it is the Gospel that opens the door to fresh air, the fresh air of heaven? Perhaps the Gospel is God’s finest idea in the universe and He does not need or care about our self-styled, overconfident, fresh ideas?

Perhaps the best idea we could possibly have is to preach, teach and administer the Sacraments?
Perhaps the best idea of all is the love of Christ?

Some would say, “A leader never asks his followers to do more than he does.” Perhaps the problem is we are asking both our pastors and our followers to do more than Christ has asked from us? Perhaps the problem is that we believe the people are *our* followers and not followers of Christ? Perhaps the pastor should quit “doing” and start proclaiming? Perhaps the leaders should quit burdening pastors and people with heavy loads and start relying on the Gospel?

Some would say, “Today more than ever, the WELS needs effective leadership in its parishes.” Perhaps, today more than ever, the WELS and every other church needs the effective Gospel of Jesus Christ? Perhaps every church today needs leadership that is willing to throw out all the worldly distractions, get out the Bible and make the Gospel the focus of their ministry? Perhaps more than ever effective leadership means making the hard decisions, making drastic changes, cutting to the bone, cutting out the cancer, rejecting all the artificial business principles and returning to the sincere and true Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Some would say, “What a great definition of leadership—speaking with wisdom and knowledge for the common good of everyone!” In 1 Corinthians 12:7-8 it says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit...” Perhaps the common good of everyone is contained in the Gospel? Perhaps the work of the Holy Spirit is to point us all to Christ? Perhaps the wisdom of God is the Gospel and not our phony ideas? Perhaps we have substituted the wisdom and knowledge of man for the wisdom and knowledge of God’s Word for too long?

Some would say, “We simply cannot be satisfied with leadership that is poor or even mediocre.” Perhaps our great Leader, Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church is not mediocre? Perhaps we have been replacing Jesus Christ with mediocre human leaders for too long? Perhaps we have been riding high on the cotton candy of our own brilliance and now the sugar high is plummeting us into the depression and reality of our own futility?

Some would say, “Pastors who are totally committed to excellence will infuse their members with the same commitment to excellence.” And some would say, “...laymen must step up and

provide the support and encouragement talented pastors need...” The Gospel begets the Gospel. When pastors are totally committed to the Gospel, they will be allowing God the opportunity to create, sustain and strengthen the faith that makes us more than excellent. When pastors are faithfully preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, proclaiming the Gospel, lifting high the cross of Jesus Christ, then and only then will the excellence of Christ permeate our lives and ministries. Lay men and women must step up and provide the support and encouragement talented and especially not so talented pastors need and that is the Gospel. When laypeople are faithfully sharing the Gospel with their pastor and others, lifting high the cross of Jesus Christ, ministering and not manipulating, then and only then will the holiness, perfection and righteousness that can never be taken away from us, pervade our entire lives and ministries. Unless and until this happens, the WELS and other church bodies may or may not continue to decline in membership, but at least they will all be doing what we are supposed to be doing – sharing the Gospel and loving each other now and for all eternity.

The Way It Should Be

Go into all the world. KISS. Preach, teach and administer the Sacraments. Proclaim the Gospel. Live in the holiness of Christ. Love one another as Christ loves us. Quit taking yourself so seriously. Leave the results up to God. Fall asleep in Jesus. Go to heaven. Enjoy eternal life. Always put the **FOCUS** on Christ and His love.

Could you use some other examples? Since this publication is somewhat about my experiences, take for instance my enjoyment of the theatre. At one point in my life I did twenty productions in four years, ranging anywhere from producer/director to pushing a broom cleaning the stage and pretty much everything in-between. For two years I was a sound man for a fairly popular rock group called “Rainbow.” When I lived in Monroe, MI I used to help out at the [River Raisin Centre for the Arts](#) doing lights and running the sound system for various singers and groups, like The Oakridge Boys, Rita Coolidge, Capital Steps, Celtic Fusion and many others. Does that mean I should insist on big theatrical productions, using all my dramatic expertise, and declare it ministry? Should I scream at my church if they do not have professional lighting and sound systems being run by skilled operators? Should I run people into the ground if they do not care for my genre of drama or style of music? Or should I **focus** on Christ, perhaps give a few loving suggestions and leave it at that?

I thoroughly take pleasure in children, schools and especially organized camps. I have been on two planning committees for youth rallies – national and regional. I grew up around teachers, mowed their lawns, took care of their animals, went jogging, fishing and boating with them. I have taken teacher training classes and have done student teaching in a public classroom. I have tutored various children in English and math as a part of the [H.O.S.T.S.](#) program. I have been a president of a local PTA group. My father was on the local school board. My mother was a teacher's aide. My brother and his wife are public school teachers. I have over thirty years of experience with youth and organized camps. I have been a member of the [American Camping Association](#). I have done everything from being a camper, to a counselor to a camp manager and pretty much everything in-between. I could easily see myself being a teacher or better yet, heading a camp or retreat center full time. Does that mean I should stop everything, push some huge year around camp, using all my vast educational knowledge and proficiency and label it ministry? Should I yell from the rooftops about how wonderful my background is and tell people about what great and awesome ideas I have about youth work? Should I brag about my capability as a teacher and be adamant that other people follow my faultless paradigms? Or should I **focus** on Christ, enjoy the times I have with the youth and leave the rest up to God? Should I **focus** on myself or Christ and His love?

I truly enjoy computers. I learned on one of the first archetype computers, called an IBM mag card machine. I studied computing and programming in college and helped develop and assemble the first computer lab at the college I attended. I was a Beta tester for Microsoft. I owned and operated my own Bulletin Board Service, before the Internet became eminent. I owned my own company for five years, called "Software Consulting." I was the pastoral advisor for Teltech, which was the church's national taskforce on telecommunications and technology. I have my own website and have built some of my own computers. I use a desktop, laptop, PDA and cell phone. Does that mean I should concentrate on promoting technological advances at my church and insist that I have all the hi-tech answers? Should I shriek at the members of my congregation, insisting that they are hindering the Gospel, if they do not have the latest technical innovations? Or should I **focus** on Christ, be thankful I have a computer to do my work on, and rely on the Gospel to create, strengthen and sustain faith?

I am not totally ignorant of the business world, although I would not call myself an expert. While growing up, my father was at one time the President of the National Management Association for The Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan. When he retired he was “Senior Technical Building Supervisor of Process Development” at Dow. I am very pleased with his living example as an extremely hard working and devoted father! I worked at Dow for a year and a half. My mother, sister, brother and wife all worked at Dow at one time or another. I was the assistant manager of a college bookstore for two years. I was the lab assistant for the Biology department in college for a year. I was a dorm Senator while in college. I have effectively managed a summer camp. I owned my own business for five years. I have been the recording secretary on the Board of Directors for several different groups, both religious and secular. At one point in my life, I was working with others on a project to run a multi-disciplinary retreat center, where people could come for physical, mental and spiritual comfort and healing, but regrettably we could never come up with enough money. Does that mean I should shove my business principles down people’s throats and insist that I am far superior to them because of my vast occupational shrewdness? Should I bawl about how we are not doing effective ministry if people are not following my prized principles? Should I wail about how no one can see my particular vision for the future? Should I bemoan and belabor the fact that we could not drum up enough cash for a retreat center? Or should I **focus** on Christ, rejoice that He is Lord of all and be thankful for His cherished forgiveness and eternal Paradise?

Do you want to talk about cross-cultural ministry? I have been white water rafting in Alaska and down the Colorado River. I have canoed the Missanabi River for 150 miles and taken a train to James Bay in Canada. I have fished for catfish in Florida and walleye in Ontario. I have flown in a hot air balloon over Pittsburgh, PA and worked on my private pilots license over Edgewood, NM. I have been to Windsor, Toronto, New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston and Detroit. I have owned motorcycles and been boating on the Great Lakes. I have worked on ceramics with my Grandmother at her shop and played the Recorder in a quartet with musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I have sat in a semi-truck with my Grandfather and shook hands with the Governor of Michigan. I have known some of the most Godly, wonderful, loving and kind people on the face of the earth and I have known some of the most evil, despicable, hateful, rotten people on the face of the earth. I have been passionately loved and I

have been ardently hated. I have had lunch with celebrities and chatted with the homeless. I have learned from geniuses and taught the mentally challenged. I have been in nursing homes and the home of a president. I have seen a person overdose on drugs and socialized with the rich and famous. I have witnessed automobile accidents and kittens being born. I have a brother who lives in Maui and friends who reside in England. I have gutted a fish and stood beside a surgeon as they removed a part of an intestine. I have sat through an autopsy and planted some trees.

I have hunted for deer in Maryland and driven down the Al/Can highway through the Yukon Territory. I have worked at a Holiday Inn and snoozed in a Hilton. I have suffered through thick smog and benefited from the fresh air of a calm mountain breeze. I have seen the Chugach, Rocky, Smoky, Appalachian, Jemez, Cibola and Sandia Mountains. I have hiked in Hocking Hills, Ohio, been to the observation deck of the CN Tower in Toronto, gazed from the heights of the Sears Towers in Chicago, peered from the pinnacle of the Arch in St. Louis and enjoyed Loveland Pass near Denver, Colorado. I have had a call to Papua, New Guinea and Malawi, Africa. My parents have had exchange students from Germany and Brazil. I had an “adopted” brother who was Black, while people in our town were still burning down the homes of the Black. I have friends that are Hispanic, Native American and Anglo. I have been to Quito, Ecuador and Nogales, Mexico. I have taken pleasure in Fairbanks, AK, North Pole, AK and the Kenai Peninsula. I have seen the vice-president of the United States face-to-face and given aid to a violin playing beggar on the street. I have enjoyed awesome health and endured sleep apnea, high cholesterol, diverticulitis and hypoglycemia. I have learned sign language and Spanish, Greek and German. I have been inside the Space Shuttle and outside the White House. I have ridden a single speed bicycle eighty miles a day and laid in a hospital bed with excruciating pain after having surgery. I have swam in the Atlantic Ocean when it was warm and been chilled by a barefoot walk in Lake Superior. I have camped in a deep woods and dined in a five star restaurant. I have slept in a lean-to in the middle of the winter and slumbered in an elegant hotel in the summer. I have seen dog sled races and remote control car races. I have seen Banff and Jasper, the Rio Grande, the mighty Mississippi, the Continental Divide and the Equator.

I have eaten fabulous BBQ in Texas and Hatch green chiles in New Mexico. I have driven a pickup truck through the Jemez back country wilderness and taken a van through the Fourth of July Canyon in the Cibolas. I have treasured an all night Gospel-fest in Renfro Valley and

discovered the wonders of Mammoth Caves. I have been up to my neck in raw sewage while trying to fix a clogged septic system and wrapped to my ears in fine clothing while enjoying a symphony orchestra. I have been to a feast thrown for me by Apaches on their reservation and eaten off from dirty dishes with friends in their home. I have listened to Shakespeare in Stratford, Ontario and Bach in Interlochen, Michigan. I have watched the Pittsburgh Pirates, Toledo Mudhens, Detroit Tigers and the Pistons. I have a son who played basketball with the Harlem Globetrotters. I have cheered for the University of Michigan when they played Ohio State. I have seen Mt. McKinley and Denali, Mt. Capulin, Mt. Arvon, Mt. Rushmore, Mt. Saint Helen's after it erupted, Yellowstone while Old Faithful erupted and Niagara Falls while it misted. I have been to Mackinac Island, Disney Land and Disney World, Sea World and Cypress Gardens. I have visited St. Augustine, Henry Ford Museum, Sauder Village and Green Field Village. I have shopped in Cabela's, Wall Drug and Old Town. I have been to the Senior Prom and seen Todd Rudgren in concert. I have fished the Kenai, St. John, Tittabawassee and Au Sable Rivers. I have seen moose, grizzly bear, Dahl sheep, mule deer, a porcupine, skunk, owl, bat, fox, mink and squirrel in the wild. I have worked at a radio station and listened to satellite transmissions. I have camped in the Sylvania Wilderness and Algonquin Provincial Park. I have read a book while sitting in a pile of Spanish moss and been nose to nose with a Water Moccasin while swimming. I have seen a lady who could blow cigarette smoke out of her ear and a man who could balance an egg on the head of a nail. I have canoed Dog Lakes and the Sand River in Ontario.

I have been bow hunting in the forest and skiing down a mountain. I have been rear ended four times – twice my vehicle was totaled. I have broken my wrist twice and my leg once, in four and half places. I have raced in races and rested in quiet places. I have seen gorgeous vistas and seemingly bottomless pits. I have driven through snow squalls and bicycled through rain storms. I have walked through the desert and climbed wooded mountain trails. I have looked through giant telescopes and peered through powerful microscopes. I have stared at the stars and closely examined piles of rocks. I have seen casinos in Reno, NV and the red light districts in other cities. I have rode horses, fixed fences, cleaned toilets and picked up after my four children. I have fed a chicken and milked a cow. I have built a tree house, a fort and a river raft and watched a house burn down. I have fixed a door and broken a window. I have held a snake and killed a mouse. I have had pneumonia and been told I had four months to live and I have been assured I

have eternal life. I have lived next door to a university professor as well as a child molester. I have lived by authors and artists as well as witches and warlocks. I have been loved by a gay and hated by some so-called Christians. I have stroked a camel and been bitten by a dog. I have been on patrol with a policeman and done rounds with a doctor. I have seen the particle accelerator in Los Alamos and toured Enrico Fermi Atomic Power Plant in Michigan. I have seen over a dozen national parks, including the spectacular Grand Canyon and seen the squalor and stench of a garbage dump. I have been friends with a Muslim in Malaysia and a supporter of a self proclaimed polyglot professor, reformed Harvard anthropologist, academic gypsy, retired international “civil” servant, founding President of Antarctic University, United Nations philosopher and the first UN Santa. I have known missionaries and Marines, pilots and scientists. I have worked on a farm and rested in a spa. I have visited the ghetto as well as affluent neighborhoods. I have climbed a tall tree and explored a deep cave. I have visited prisoners in high security prisons and worked with patients in a locked up psychiatric unit. I have enjoyed the genius of Mozart and seen the insanity of schizophrenia. I have danced a waltz and sang a lullaby. I have relaxed in a hot tub and sweated in a sauna. I have visited lighthouses, museums, zoos, aquariums and gardens. I have been in a car going 180 mph and walked at a snails pace with a friend along a sandy beach. I have explored the Smithsonian Institute and splashed in the Pacific Ocean. I have flown in numerous airplanes and seen the inside of a submarine and a giant Navy ship. I have shot a pistol and watched a hog being slaughtered. I have roasted marshmallows and made s’mores by an open fire and helped put out fires. I have held a baby and cradled the elderly. I have enjoyed amusement parks, water parks, virgin forest parks and the smell of salt air after a tempest. I have had the measles and mumps and shots for yellow fever and hepatitis. I have taken medicine for Malaria and prayed for a cure for the common cold.

I have seen a family with six toes and some people with no toes at all. I have been at the bedside of those who were dying and stood beside my wife as she gave birth to our children. I have worked in a hospital in the emergency room, oncology, obstetrics and gynecology and been the pastor of a church. I have been trick or treating and walked inner city streets at 2:00 AM. I have shamelessly cried while watching a movie and wildly laughed while seeing a play. I have been punched in the face, shot at with a gun, threatened with a knife, hugged, kissed and loved. I have known a person who literally plucked out their own eyes because they offended them and was

friends with a boy who shot himself in the head. I have read good books and bad; watched sad movies and glad; listened to beautiful music and noise; watched a destructive tornado and a constructive ant build a home. I have literally encountered God and satan, demons and angels. The more culture I experience, the more I want to **focus** on Christ!

I could write page after page about all the different cross-cultural experiences I have had in my life. I could completely focus on myself and all my experiences. Who cares? They might be entertaining stories for some, but can they create and sustain faith? Did I die for your sins? Can I open heaven's doors? Did I defeat sin, satan, death and hell? For me, the greatest experience in the universe happened when Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross and rose from the dead on Easter morning – so that our sins could be forgiven. The most meaningful, personal experience I have ever had is when the Holy Spirit entered my heart and created faith in Christ and His love and pardon. God has certainly seen to it that I have had encounters with a great many things – some awesome and great, others not so splendid and terrific. However, I still cannot wait to get to heaven. That is my daily **focus**. I do not care if my name is ever found on a publishers list, as long as my name is written in the Book of Life.

I repeat: Our **focus** should never be on ourselves and our supposed lofty astuteness, but always on Christ and the Gospel and His love. As long as we are sharing His love, preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments, we are doing God's will. It normally makes very little difference what structure we utilize, unless we happen to be preaching in Swahili in a church filled with people who only know Dutch. In Christian freedom, if you want to use the Amplified Bible and not the New American Standard Bible it is not a sin. God will still have mercy on you, although, do not be cantankerous if everyone does not agree with your choice of translation. If you want to build huge edifices, schools, cross cultural ministries, theme parks, camps, publishing houses or whatever, go right ahead. If it makes any difference, you have my blessing. Just make absolutely, positively sure that all of your preparations and plans and entire **focus** is on Christ and His love and not on your snobbish know-how and disparaging condescension and you will always find victory and eternal triumph in Him. Skip the seditious rhetoric and stick with the tenderness of Christ. Quit tooting your own horn and sound the clear trumpet of the Gospel.

God's Word will always accomplish what God wants it to accomplish and to build a straw man to some how prove that your way, your method or your version of God's Word is going to

accomplish more of what God wants to accomplish is incongruous. God's Word says, "preach." In Romans 10:14-15 it says, "How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!'" The Bible does not give volume after volume about what makes a fabulous sermon, except to tell us it had better include the Good News. If people want to write volume after volume on what they think is a good sermon, that is their privilege. Just do not try to push it off as God's Word and demand that your style, your homiletical principles, your particular focus must be followed as Gospel truth. God's Word says, "teach." In Titus 2:1 it says, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." God's Word does not give a multitude of commands about what constitutes marvelous teaching. It does say you **must** teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. If someone desires to print tome after tome about what makes the perfect teacher, that is their right. It is not your right to arrogantly assume that those same principles, methods, means or ways are right for everyone. Make a suggestion and leave it at that. Do not build a huge straw man about how your principles are the best, the be all, end all and if someone does not follow your precious principles than they are stupid, idiotic, unsupportive or unloving. It is not unloving for different people to use different methods. It is unloving to get angry at someone and ostracize, shun, snub and otherwise make someone's life miserable because they happen to disagree with you. If you disagree on sound doctrine, you have a problem. If you disagree on principles, methods, attitudes and opinions – so what?!? Suggest all you want, but leave the commanding up to God. Love each other like Christ loves you.

ALWAYS FOCUS ON CHRIST AND HIS LOVE.

Conclusion

In my estimation, if you have never been to the [Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta](#) you are missing a wonderful sight. For me it is an incredible spectacle – watching hundreds of hot air balloons all in one place. Except one year we had a problem. There are six in our family and it was dinner time. What were we going to eat? I wanted a nice, relaxing, sit down dinner, in the shade. My wife wanted sausage. My oldest wanted a hamburger. My next oldest wanted a burrito. My next oldest wanted a hot dog. My youngest did not know what they wanted. There was no place

where you could get six different things in one place. What were we going to do? Who was going to “win”? Whose idea was the most anointed? Whose suggestion was going to convince the others? What would Jesus do? Too many churches are facing these kinds of decisions and instead of lovingly working them out, individuals go on the rampage, throw temper tantrums and insist their idea is the best one. In our case, we believed that the **focus** should be on the balloon fiesta, not our stomachs. We found a picnic table, watched the balloons glowing and went out two by two to the different food concessions and each got the food they wanted. As a result, everyone enjoyed both the food and the balloon fiesta. What is my conclusion? Change your **focus** back to Christ and the Gospel and perhaps you can enjoy both your precious buildings, programs, groups and other distractions and the real ministry that God has given us in Christ. Quit confusing earthly things with heavenly things and perhaps you will quit making your life and the lives of others miserable. Quit building an earthly kingdom and start enjoying Christ’s heavenly kingdom. Quit confusing artificial programs with true Gospel ministry. After all, Jesus did say, “Seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things will be given to you.”

What would I say, if you personally asked me what I truly believed about pastoral leadership? I would quote from “*Shepherd Under Christ*” (© Northwestern Publishing House, 2nd Edition 1981, pages 329 and 330), “Pastoral leadership must depend not merely on the pastor’s natural ability to lead. He must consciously seek to develop those qualities that will enable him to provide leadership. He will need to learn and to perform those functions that help a group of people in a congregation to work together most effectively toward their common purpose.” And, “The pastor’s *love for people* will promote good leadership.” But I would say it in a very loving, gentle way and **focus** on Christ and His love.

Otherwise, there is no conclusion, because God’s Word, His kingdom and the Gospel goes on forever. I deeply and sincerely apologize to anyone if they were insulted by anything I have said or by the way I have said it. After all the pain I have experienced in my life, I sympathetically have no desire to hurt anyone. If anything I have said has lead you to repentance I am glad. My heartfelt goal was to share the love and peace of Christ - to glorify and **focus** on Him and the Gospel. To whatever extent I have failed, I genuinely ask for forgiveness. Personally, I have loved being a pastor and 99 times out of 100 enjoyed it very much. The vast majority of God’s

people are wonderful, generous, supportive, cooperative, loving and kind. I would highly encourage any man who is so inclined to follow the call of Christ into the pastoral ministry. Do not let the devil scare you away by a handful of pastor abusers or the few who are arrogant or mean. Make no mistake about it, it can be extremely painful at times, but it is also tremendously worthwhile. There will be times when you are on your knees crying out for mercy from God and man. Fortunately, there will never be a time when you will have to cry out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” There is still no greater or more important message on the face of the earth than the Gospel. There is no better calling than that of a pastor. Being a pastor is still the greatest job in the entire world with the most awesome eternal benefits available in any profession. It definitely helps to remember that our reward is in heaven, not on earth. We are working for a heavenly King, not an earthly king. He has given us the victory over all our enemies. Let Christ be your **focus**. He too had His problems at the hands of hateful sinners, but in the end He was still willing to say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” His **focus** was on the joy of salvation and heaven set before Him. May Christ’s **focus** always be your **focus!!!**

Addendum

If you would like a tool to help you **focus** on Jesus everyday, please feel free to print these:

Hebrews 2:18-3:1 Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted. Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.

Hebrews 12:2-3 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart!

Romans 8:28-39 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 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.

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on

THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of TRUTH buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of RIGHTEOUSNESS in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from THE GOSPEL of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of FAITH, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of SALVATION and the sword of THE SPIRIT, which is THE WORD OF GOD. And PRAY in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

SUNDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

GROW IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE = GROW IN JESUS!!!

Jesus Loves us. 1 John 3:16 This is how we know what Love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.

John 15:9 As the Father has Loved Me, so have I Loved you. Now remain in My Love.

Jesus is Love. 1 John 4:8 God is Love.

Jesus is God. Colossians 2:9-10 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is The Head over every power and authority.

Jesus Died for us sinners. Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ Died for us.

Jesus will never Leave us or Forsake us. Hebrews 13:5 Never will I Leave you; never will I Forsake you.

Matthew 28:20 Surely I am with you Always, to the very end of the age.

Jesus Fulfilled the Law completely. Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for He who loves His fellow man has Fulfilled the Law.

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to Fulfill them.

Jesus gives us the Victory over sin. Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than Conquerors through Him who loved us.

Jesus Intercedes for us. Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus is greater than our heart. 1 John 3:20 And if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart!

Jesus is our Teacher. Matthew 23:10 Nor are you to be called "teacher," for you have one Teacher, the Christ.

Jesus makes us Fishers of Men. Matthew 4:19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you Fishers of Men."

Jesus works Everything in conformity to His will. Ephesians 1:11-12 "In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory."

MONDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus Destroyed death for us. 2 Timothy 1:8-10 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord or ashamed of me His prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the Gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has Destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

Jesus Destroyed the devil for us. Hebrews 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might Destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Jesus is LORD. Acts 10:36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is LORD of all.

Jesus will Return. Matthew 25:31 When the Son of Man Returns in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will rule on His throne.

Jesus is the King. Revelation 17:14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.

Jesus is the Lamb. John 1:29 Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Jesus is the Vine. John 15:5 I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

Jesus suffered so we could be Healed. Isaiah 53:5 But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are Healed.

Jesus is the Gate. John 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.”

Jesus is the Word. John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus is the Son of God. Mark 1:1 The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus is our Savior. Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.

Jesus Healed a demon-possessed boy. Matthew 17:18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was Healed from that moment.

TUESDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus quenches our Thirst. John 7:37 If anyone is Thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

Jesus has Risen! Matthew 28:6 He is not here; He has Risen, just as He said.

Jesus was Baptized. Matthew 3:16 Jesus was Baptized.

Jesus is the Rock. 1 Corinthians 10:4 They drank from the Spiritual Rock that accompanied them, and that Rock was Christ.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Jesus is the Light. John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, “I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life.”

Jesus is our Holiness (sanctification). 1 Corinthians 1:30 It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, Holiness and redemption.

Jesus is our Justification. Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our Justification.

Jesus is our Righteousness. Matthew 6:33 But seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Jesus is our Passover Lamb. 1 Corinthians 5:7 For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

Jesus is the Righteous One. 1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Jesus is our Atoning Sacrifice. 1 John 2:2 He is the Atoning Sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus = Grace. Romans 6:14 For you are not under Law, but under Grace.

Jesus Suffered and Rose again. Luke 24:46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will Suffer and Rise from the dead on the third day.”

Jesus had Compassion. Matthew 20:34 Jesus had Compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.

Jesus is the Prophet from Nazareth. The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the Prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

WEDNESDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus is our Friend. John 15:12-14 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My Friends if you do what I command.

Jesus is Preparing us a place. John 14:2 In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to Prepare a place for you.

Jesus Casts out all fear. 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love Casts out all fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Jesus is our Full Armor. Ephesians 6:14-17 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Jesus is our Mediator. Hebrews 9:15 For this reason Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Jesus is our Redeemer. Galatians 3:13 Christ Redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Jesus is our Brother. Hebrews 2:11 Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them Brothers.

Jesus Chose us. John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I Chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Jesus brought Grace and Truth. John 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into the World. John 11:27 “Yes, Lord,” she told Him, “I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the World.”

Jesus is Eternal Life. John 17:3 Now this is Eternal Life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

Jesus has All Authority. Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”

Jesus Healed various diseases. Mark 1:34 Jesus Healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons.

Jesus is Wisdom from God. 1 Corinthians 1:30 You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us Wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

THURSDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus is our Hope. Colossians 1:27 God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory.

Jesus is our Peace. John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; My Peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jesus shed His Blood. Hebrews 9:12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own Blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Jesus gives us His Body and Blood. Matthew 26:26-27 Take and eat; this is My Body... Drink from it, all of you. This is My Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus' blood Purifies us. 1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, Purifies us from all sin.

Jesus is the Messiah. Mark 14:61-62 Again the high priest asked Him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and arriving on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus is the Son of Man. Matthew 9:6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... (Jesus healed the paralytic.)

Jesus is Unchangeable. Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the Same yesterday and today and forever.

Jesus Knows all things. John 21:17 "Lord, You Know all things."

Jesus is all Powerful. Matthew 28:18 All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

Jesus is Creator. John 1:3 Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.

Jesus grants us Everything. 2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted us Everything pertaining to life and Godliness.

Jesus is both Lord and Christ. Acts 2:36 Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Jesus Blesses us Spiritually. Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has Blessed us in the heavenly realms with every Spiritual blessing in Christ.

Jesus Rescues us from wrath. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who Rescues us from the coming wrath.

FRIDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus Suffered. 1 Peter 2:21 To this (suffering) you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.

Jesus is the Sustainer. Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful Word.

Jesus deserves Honor. John 5:23 He who does not Honor the Son does not Honor the Father, who sent Him.

Jesus deserves Worship. Hebrews 1:6 Let all of God's angels worship Him.

Jesus Wept. John 11:35 Jesus wept.

Jesus is the Author of Life. Acts 3:15 You killed the Author of Life, but God raised Him from the dead.

Jesus is our Ransom. Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a Ransom for many.

Jesus is The Prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to Him.

Jesus was Conceived. Matthew 1:20 What is Conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was Born. Luke 2:7 And she gave Birth to her firstborn, a Son.

Jesus has set us Free. Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit of life set me Free from the Law of sin and death.

Jesus Lives in me. Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ Lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Jesus Died for the Ungodly. Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ Died for the Ungodly.

Jesus Will Return With His Holy Ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Returns With All His Holy Ones.

SATURDAY - FIX YOUR EYES AND THOUGHTS ON JESUS!

Jesus is the Christ. John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.

Jesus Lifts us up. Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He Lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a Rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Jesus is the Author and Perfector of our faith. Hebrews 12:1-3 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. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Jesus helps us Resist the devil. James 4:7-8 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Jesus is Contentment. Philippians 4:11 For me to live is Christ—I can be Content in all circumstances.

Jesus Cares for us. 1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He Cares for you.

Jesus Keeps us. 1 John 5:18 We now know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God (Jesus) keeps him and the evil one does not touch him.

Jesus makes us secure. Romans 8:29f No Man shall pluck me out of His hands. Nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ!

Jesus will Overthrow and Destroy the lawless one. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will Overthrow with the breath of His mouth and Destroy by the splendor of His coming.

Jesus Saves sinners. 1 Timothy 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to Save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

Jesus has a Permanent Priesthood. Hebrews 7:24 Because Jesus lives forever, He has a Permanent Priesthood.

Jesus gives us Grace. 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! AMEN!

God's Word – A Study Of The Book Of James

Do you want to be more proficient in God's Word? If so, I have included this study of the book of James as an example of how to approach God's Word using the Biblical paradigm of the love and holiness of God.

How should we approach the Bible?

We should always approach the Bible as God's Word.

What does it mean that the Bible is God's Word?

It means that it is God talking to us and revealing His nature and will to us. Therefore every single Word and thought is utterly important.

How can that be?

In John 1:1 it says, "1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It says in 1 John 5, "The Spirit is the Truth." Since God is the Word and the Truth, the Bible is God and it is vital that we pay attention to every Word He is speaking to us.

What does that tell us in regards to reading the Bible?

The Bible is not just a history, geography, grammar or story book. When you read it, always remember that every single Word is God speaking to us and thus it is totally important and means something essential for our lives as Christians. God doesn't make mistakes. Always ask yourself, "How is God revealing His nature and will to us?"

Why is it important to know how God is revealing His nature to us?

It is because God loves us and wants to intimately connect with us. God reveals His love and holiness, so that we can reflect His nature in our lives. The more we learn about the nature, the holiness, and the love of God, the more we are empowered to reflect that nature in our lives.

What does all of this have to do with our study of the book of James?

Some people believe that the book of James is all law and maybe doesn't even belong in the Bible. Our study will show us how both God's holiness and love is displayed through the book of James and thus important for our own lives. This same model of looking for God's holiness and love being displayed in His Word can be applied to every book of the Bible. Quit looking to commentaries for man's wisdom and look to God's Word for the wisdom that comes from His love and holiness being revealed in every Word.

The Epistle of James

Introduction

The Epistle of James was written to Jewish Christians. There are many Jewish features throughout the book, such as the reference to the synagogue, the Law and many Old Testament references, implying that the readers were well-acquainted with the Old Testament. The epistle is addressed to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

It is believed that James' letter was written during the "transition period," which includes the time when Christianity was first growing and the majority of believers were Jews. There were

many Jewish/Christian gatherings in Jerusalem and throughout Judea. Thousands of Jews came to faith on Pentecost and many more were added daily. These Jews, who just out of Judaism, were still zealous for the Law and temple worship. There were even Christian priests, who for a time continued in their priestly duties. Christianity was very new and there were many adjustments to learn. Some Jews still had a national hope for the restoration of the Jewish nation.

The Author

James, the brother of Christ, is the author. There were others James, such as, James the apostle and son of Zebedee, who was martyred, as recorded in Acts 12:2. James, the son of Alphaeus, also an apostle, is mentioned only once in Acts 1:13 and nothing more is said about him. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:19, that three years after his conversion he returned to Jerusalem and that he “saw no other apostle except James, the Lord’s brother.” James held a place of leadership in Jerusalem as the head of the Jewish-Christians. He presided over the first council at Jerusalem. According to some ancient historians, James was a godly man and a strong observer of the ceremonial Law, although, he still acknowledged the validity of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry among the Gentiles. Many believe the “transition” ministry of James was necessary, because it took someone like James to show the Jewish people a good example of Old Testament observance, while still promoting the Gospel. James died a year before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. According to the historian Josephus, James was stoned to death.

The Audience

“The twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”

When James wrote this epistle, there were no lost tribes, as we sometimes hear about. It is also apparent that remnants from every tribe were believers, and that this reference is to the literal twelve tribes of Israel. James, as head of the Jerusalem church, would probably be in touch with many Jews who came to Jerusalem for the various feasts. Perhaps coming to the feasts and becoming acquainted with James, some of them came to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Some of them later were scattered due to the great persecution of those Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah.

Is the Epistle of James relevant for us today?

Some say that this epistle is written to and for the Jews and not for us. However, it is still the Word of God and the truths presented in this book are just as necessary for us today as they were for those to whom the letter was originally written. The truths of James’ letter are still the truths of God and are important in our learning about the nature of God and His will for our lives.

I. The Endurance of Trials and the Exercise of Faith (James 1)

A. The Need for Patience and Wisdom (James 1:1-8)

James 1:1-8 - 1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he

who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

What does it mean to be a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Why should we consider it pure joy to face trials of many kinds?

How does the testing of our faith develop perseverance?

Why is perseverance important?

What does it mean to be mature and complete, not lacking anything?

What does it mean to lack wisdom?

How can we gain wisdom and why is that important?

What does it mean that God gives generously to all without finding fault?

What does it mean to believe and not doubt?

Why is doubt like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind?

What does it mean to be double-minded and unstable in all you do?

Why would someone not receive anything from the Lord?

B. The Realization and the Victory of Faith (James 1:9-15)

James 1:9-15 - 9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. 12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

How can we take pride in our high position, if we live in humble circumstances?

Why is being rich a low position?

How do the rich pass away like a wild flower and fade away?

If it is the sun that scorches and withers a plant, what is God's role in the life of the rich?

How are we blessed when we persevere under trial?

What is the "crown of life"?

Why are God's promises so important?

Why is the "crown of life" only given to those who love God?

Who or what is it that tempts us?

What does it mean that God cannot be tempted by evil?

Where do our evil desires come from?

How do our evil desires drag us away and entice us?

How do evil desires give birth to sin and death?

C. The Result of Faith (James 1:16-27)

James 1:16-27 - 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of

firstfruits of all he created. 19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 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.

How can we protect ourselves from being deceived?

Where does every good and perfect gift come from?

Who is the Father of the heavenly lights and what does that mean?

Why is it a comfort to us that God does not change like shifting shadows?

Did we choose God or did He choose us?

What does it mean that God gave us birth?

How did God give us birth through the Word of truth?

What all has God created?

How are we the firstfruits of all He created and what does it mean for our lives?

What is the significance of James calling the readers, "dear brothers"?

What does it mean to "take note" of something and why is it important here?

What does it mean to be quick to listen?

What does it mean to be slow to speak?

What does it mean to be slow to become angry?

What kind of righteous life does God desire? What is it a reflection of?

What is moral filth and how do we get rid of all of it?

What is evil and how do we get rid of all of it?

What does it mean to humbly accept the Word planted in you?

How does the Word save us?

How come we shouldn't merely listen to the Word? Isn't listening to the Word important? How can merely listening to the Word be deceiving?

How can we do what the Word says?

What does looking into a mirror have to do with looking at ourselves through the Word?

Why is it important that we never forget what we look like according to the Word?

How does looking intently into the perfect law give us freedom?

How are we blessed when we look intently into the perfect law and not forget what we heard?

What does it mean to be "religious"?

What kind of people consider themselves to be "religious"?

What does being religious have to do with keeping a tight reign on your tongue?

What does not keeping a tight reign on your tongue have to do with being deceived?

Why does not keeping a tight reign on your tongue make your religion worthless?

Why does God consider pure and faultless religion looking after orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world?

How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting the nature of the God in our lives?

II. The Royal Law and the Relation of Works to Faith (James 2)

A. The Royal Law with Respect to Persons (James 2:1-13)

James 2:1-13 - 1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

What is the relationship between being brothers and being believers?

Who is the glorious Lord Jesus Christ and why is He glorious?

What does it mean to show special attention or to show favoritism?

Why should we never show favoritism?

What's the difference between a man who wears a gold ring and wears fine clothes and a man in shabby clothes?

What's the difference between a good seat and a bad seat?

Why is sitting showing favoritism and standing up or sitting by your feet not showing favoritism?

How is discrimination being a judge with evil thoughts?

What does it mean for a dear brother to listen?

Have we chosen God or has He chosen us?

Did God choose us because we were rich or famous or intelligent or powerful?

Who did God choose?

What are the "eyes of the world"?

What does it mean to be rich in faith?

What does it mean to inherit the kingdom that God promised?

What does it mean to love God?

How were the people insulting the poor and which poor were they insulting?

How were the rich exploiting them?

Why were the rich dragging them into court?

Is it wrong to drag someone into court?

How were the rich slandering the noble Name of Him to whom they belonged?

Why is Christ's Name considered noble?

What does it mean to belong to the noble Name of Christ?
What is the “royal law” found in Scripture?
What does it mean to “Love your neighbor as yourself”?
What does it mean to do right?
Why is showing favoritism a sin and how are we convicted by the law as lawbreakers?
Can anyone keep the whole law?
Why does stumbling at just one point in the law make us guilty of breaking all of it?
Who said, “Do not commit adultery, etc.”?
Why did God say, “Do not commit adultery”?
Why did God say, “Do not murder”?
What does it mean to be a lawbreaker?
Which is more important, speaking or acting?
What does it mean to be judged by the law that gives freedom?
How does the law give us freedom?
What is judgment without mercy?
Why is mercy so important?
How does mercy triumph over judgment?
How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

B. Faith Must Be Noticeable By Words (James 2:14-26)

James 2:14-16 - 14 - What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

What is the relationship between faith and deeds?
How does faith save us?
What is a “brother or sister”?
If God takes care of our every need, why would a brother or sister ever be without clothes or daily food?
Why would a Christian ever say, “Go, I wish you well.”? Is that wrong?
Why should a Christian take care of a brother or sister’s physical needs? What good is it?
How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

III. The Control of the Tongue - True and False Wisdom (James 3)

A. The Tongue (James 3:1-12)

James 3:1-12 - 1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Why should many Christians not presume to be teachers?

Why are teachers judged more strictly?

How do we all stumble in many ways?

How can we be perfect?

How does never being at fault in what you say keep your whole body in check?

Why do we put bits into the mouths of horses?

Why do we want horses to obey us?

Why do ships have rudders?

Who is it that steers the ship and why is that important?

How can a "tongue" make great boasts?

What does a forest fire have to do with the tongue?

How is the tongue a fire?

Why is the tongue a world of evil among the parts of the body?

How does the tongue corrupt the whole person?

How does the tongue set the whole course of our life on fire?

How is the tongue itself set on fire by hell?

Why do we tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea?

Why is a distinction made between all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea?

How come no man can tame the tongue?

Why is the tongue a restless evil?

Why is the tongue full of deadly poison?

How do we use our tongue to praise our Lord and Father?

What is the difference between the Lord and the Father?

How do we use our tongue to curse men?

What is the significance of us being made in God's likeness?

How can praise and cursing come from the same mouth? How come it shouldn't be?

What does both fresh water and salt water flowing from the same spring have to do with the tongue?

What does a fig tree bearing olives have to do with the tongue?

What does a grapevine bearing figs have to do with the tongue?

What does a salt spring producing fresh water have to do with the tongue?

Why does God use so many different ways to tell us the same thing?

How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

B. True and False Wisdom (James 3:13-18)

James 3:13-18 - 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and

selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Who is wise and understanding among you?

How should our wisdom and understanding be shown?

What is a "good life"?

What are "deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom"?

What is humility?

What is wisdom?

What is bitter envy?

What is selfish ambition?

What does it mean to harbor them in our hearts?

What is wrong with harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition?

What does it mean to boast?

What does it mean to deny the truth?

Why is it wrong to boast or deny the truth?

Why is "wisdom" in quotations?

What does it mean that "wisdom" does not come down from heaven?

What does it mean to be earthly?

What does it mean to be unspiritual?

What does it mean to be of the devil? (1 John 3:8)

Why is it bad to be earthly, unspiritual and of the devil?

What is envy?

What is selfish ambition?

What does envy and selfish ambition cause?

What is disorder?

What is every evil practice?

Why are disorder and every evil practice bad?

What is the wisdom that comes from heaven?

What does it mean to be pure?

What does it mean to be peace-loving?

What does it mean to be considerate?

What does it mean to be submissive?

What does it mean to be full of mercy?

What does it mean to be full of good fruit?

What does it mean to be impartial?

What does it mean to be sincere?

Why is it good to be pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, full of good fruit, impartial and sincere?

What is the only way that we can be all of these things at all times?

What is peace?

What is a peacemaker?

What does it mean to sow in peace?

What is a harvest of righteousness?

How does sowing in peace raise a harvest of righteousness?

How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

IV. Exhortations to Right Living (James 4)

James 4 - 1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. 11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? 13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

What are fights and quarrels?

What causes fights and quarrels among you?

What is a desire and how can a desire do battle?

Do fights and quarrels come from your desires that battle within you?

Where did those desires that battle within you come from?

What is wrong with wanting something and not getting it?

What does it mean to kill?

What does it mean to covet?

How come you cannot have what you want?

What is wrong with quarreling and fighting?

How does one "ask God"?

How can we presume to ask God for anything?

What would be a wrong motive?

What is a pleasure?

What is wrong with spending what we get on our pleasures?

What does it mean to be adulterous?

What does it mean to have a friendship?

What is the world?
What is hatred?
Why is being adulterous and friendship with the world considered hatred toward God?
How do we choose to be a friend of the world?
What does it mean to be an enemy?
Why does being a friend of the world make us an enemy of God?
What "Scripture" is James referring to here?
Does the Scripture ever say anything without a reason?
What is the primary purpose of the Scripture?
What Spirit did God cause to live in us?
Why did God cause His Spirit to live in us?
What does it mean to envy intensely?
Why would God's Spirit envy intensely? Isn't that a sin?
What is grace?
How can God give us more grace than He already has?
What does it mean to be proud?
What does it mean to be humble?
What does it mean to oppose?
Why would God oppose the proud, but give grace to the humble?
What does it mean to submit?
How can we submit to God?
What does it mean to resist?
Who is the devil?
How can we resist the devil?
What does it mean to flee?
Why will the devil flee from us if we resist him?
How do we come near to God? Doesn't He need to come near to us first?
What does it mean to wash your hands?
How do we wash our hands?
What does it mean to purify our hearts?
How do we purify our hearts?
What does it mean to be double-minded?
How do we stop being double minded?
What does it mean to grieve?
What does it mean to mourn?
What does it mean to wail?
Why should we grieve, mourn and wail if we have been washed and purified?
How do we humble ourselves before the Lord?
What does it mean to be lifted up by the Lord?
Why does James use the title "Lord" and not "Savior" here? (Yahweh)
What is slander?
Why is it wrong for Christians to slander one another?
What does it mean to speak against your brother?
What does it mean to judge your brother?
How is speaking against and judging your brother speaking against the law?
How is speaking against and judging your brother judging the law?

How are you not keeping the law, when you are judging it?
How is judging the law, “sitting in judgment on it”? Why does James make this distinction?
What is a Lawgiver?
What is a Judge?
Who is the only Lawgiver and Judge?
How does the Lawgiver and Judge save us?
How does the Lawgiver and Judge destroy us?
Why would God save or destroy us?
Who are you to judge your neighbor?
What does it mean to listen?
Why would we say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”?
What does it mean that we do not even know what will happen tomorrow?
How should our lives be different because we do not even know what will happen tomorrow?
Who does know what is going to happen tomorrow?
What is your life?
What does it mean to be a “mist”?
Is it good or bad that we appear for a little while and then vanish?
What should we be saying about everything we do in life?
How do we know if what we are doing is God’s will at all times?
What does it mean to boast and brag?
Why is boasting and bragging evil?
Who should we boast in?
What does it mean to “know the good”? What is good?
Why is “not doing good” sinful?
How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

V. The Coming of the Lord and the Life of Faith (James 5)

A. The Oppression of the Rich and Their Doom (James 5:1-6)

James 5:1-6 - 1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

What does it mean to weep and wail?
What is misery?
Why is misery coming upon rich people and how is weeping and wailing going to help?
What is wealth?
How does wealth rot clothes and make them moth eaten?
What clothes is James referring to?
What is corrosion?

*How can gold or silver corrode?
How can corrosion testify against anyone?
What is flesh?
How can corrosion eat flesh like fire?
What does it mean to “hoard”?
What are the “last days”?
Why is hoarding wealth wrong?
What does it mean to “Look!”?
What are wages?
Why is it wrong to not pay the workmen wages?
What is the significance of the workmen who mowed the fields?
Why are the wages crying out and not the workmen?
Who are the harvesters?
Why are they crying?
How have their cries reached the ears of the Lord Almighty?
How can the Lord Almighty have ears?
Why does James use the title “Lord Almighty” and not “Savior”?
What is luxury?
What is self-indulgence?
Why is luxury and self-indulgence wrong?
What does it mean to fatten yourselves?
What is the “day of slaughter”?
What does it mean to condemn?
What does it mean to murder?
Why is it wrong to condemn and murder innocent men?
What does it mean to be an innocent man?
Why were the innocent men not opposing the rich?*

B. Exhortation to Be Patient Until the Coming of the Lord (James 5:7-12)

James 5:7-12 - 7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. 9 Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. 12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear-not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

*What does it mean to be patient?
How long are we supposed to be patient?
When is the Lord’s coming?
What does a farmer have to do with the Lord’s coming?
Why is the crop considered valuable?
What is the importance of the autumn and spring rains?
What does it mean to stand firm?*

What does it mean that the Lord's coming is near?
What does it mean to grumble?
Why is grumbling bad?
Does this mean we are not to grumble against Christians, but it's OK to grumble against unbelievers?
What does it mean to be judged?
Why will we be judged for grumbling?
Who is the Judge?
Why is the Judge standing at the door? What is the door?
What does it mean to face suffering?
Who were the prophets?
What does it mean that the prophets spoke in the Name of the Lord?
How did the prophets suffer and how are they an example for us?
What does it mean to be blessed?
What does it mean to persevere?
Why are we blessed if we persevere?
Who is Job?
Why is Job being used as an example here?
What did the Lord finally bring about for Job?
What does the Lord promise to bring about for us?
What is compassion?
What is mercy?
What does it mean that the Lord is "full" of compassion and mercy?
What does compassion and mercy have to do with being blessed and persevering?
Why would James say "above all"? How can anything be "above all"?
What does it mean to swear by heaven or earth or anything else?
Why is it wrong to swear by heaven or earth or anything else?
What does it mean to let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no?
What does it mean to be condemned?
Why would we be condemned for swearing by heaven, earth or anything else?
How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?

C. The Prayer of Faith and the Life of Faith (James 5:13-20)

James 5:13-20 - 13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

What does it mean to be in trouble?
Is anyone of you in trouble?
What should we do when we are in trouble?
What does it mean to pray?
How does prayer help us when we are in trouble?
What does it mean to be happy?
What should we do when we are happy?
What does it mean to sing songs of praise?
How does it help to sing songs of praise?
What does it mean to be sick?
What should we do when we are sick?
What does it mean to call the elders to pray over you?
What does it mean to call the elders to anoint you with oil in the Name of the Lord?
How does prayer and anointing with oil in the Name of the Lord help?
What is a “prayer offered in faith”?
Can a prayer ever be offered not in faith?
How does prayer make a person well?
Is this an absolute promise of faith healing?
What does it mean that the Lord will raise up the sick person?
What does it mean to be forgiven?
Why is forgiveness needed for sickness?
What does it mean to “confess your sins to each other”?
Why does confessing your sins to one another bring healing?
Why is it important to pray for each other?
Why does praying for each other bring healing?
What is a righteous man?
What does it mean to be powerful?
What does it mean to be effective?
Why is the prayer of a righteous man powerful and effective?
Who was Elijah?
Why is Elijah brought up here?
What does it mean that Elijah was “a man just like us”?
What does it mean to “pray earnestly”?
Why would Elijah pray that it would not rain?
Why would God answer his prayer with 3 ½ years with no rain?
How come it doesn’t say Elijah prayed earnestly for it to rain?
Where did the rains come from?
What were the results of the rain?
Why does James continually call people “brothers” throughout his letter?
What does it mean to “wander from the truth”?
What does it mean to bring someone back from wandering from the truth?
What does it mean to “remember this”?
What is the “error of his way”?
How do we turn a sinner from the error of his way?
Why are we responsible for turning a sinner from the error of his way?
What is death?

How does turning a sinner from the error of his way save him from death?

How does turning a sinner from the error of his way cover over a multitude of sins?

How does this section reflect the nature of God and how should we be reflecting that nature in our own lives?