

The New Ministers Manual

Paul W. Powell



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Dedicated
to

The Students of
Truett Seminary
and
all other young people on whom
the mantle of ministry
will fall



PREFACE

Thomas Jefferson once described the presidency as “a splendid misery.” I think that is an apt description of the ministry. I know of no calling that is more rewarding, and at the same time, more demanding than being a minister.

The modern minister faces a multitude of tasks that are both exciting and exacting. He must conduct funerals and weddings, often on the same day. He must be a scholar, a public speaker, an educator, a financier, a CEO, a personnel manager, a shepherd and a personal counselor.

While still a student at Baylor University I became pastor of an open country church. I soon found myself confronted with many things I had seen and even been a part of in my home church, but to which I paid little attention until I was called on to do them myself.

In the next 34 years I pastored churches of all sizes, my last church having more than 7,000 members.

As I became pastor of larger churches I would ask young ministers to assist me in funerals, weddings, baptisms, so they could learn firsthand what to do. What I have recorded in this book are some of the things I tried to teach them. I offer them now in print to other young ministers as a guide and an example.

I was encouraged to write this book by my long-time friend and fellow laborer, Curtis Crofton. We were friends before he came to serve on a local church staff with me. When I president of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, I asked him to become a part of that ministry. As he worked with seminary students to enroll them in the retirement and insurance programs, he sensed the need for this kind of help. It was first at his encouragement and then that of Frank Schwall, who directed the Member Services Division for the Annuity Board, that I began this work.

Now I am now Dean of Truett Theological Seminary, a part of Baylor University, Waco, Texas. In this new role, I am in constant contact with young people who are beginning where I began 47 years ago. It is for them and other like them that I offer this book.

What I recount in this book is simply my way of baptizing, administering the Lord's Supper, doing weddings and funerals, and conducting ordinations. They are my way, not the way. In time you will find your way. In the meantime, if what I have written is of help, then it has accomplished its purpose.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul W. Powell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

Paul W. Powell
July 16, 2001

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I

The Wedding



THE WEDDING PRELIMINARIES

The marriage ceremony is one of the most sacred of all rituals a minister conducts. It is never merely a social event, but is always a rite in which two persons pledge themselves to each other under the blessings of God and are united by him in holy wedlock.

At the outset of his ministry, Jesus attended a wedding at Cana of Galilee, and he chose that occasion to perform his first miracle.

Since Jesus considered weddings significantly important enough to attend, it should be the desire of every minister to make every wedding a memorable, beautiful, and meaningful event. To ensure this requires careful planning and adequate preparation. To this end, the minister should arrange for at least two prenuptial conferences with the bride and groom, one to discuss the wedding and the other to discuss the marriage.

In the first conference, detailed discussion should be given to church policies governing weddings, appropriate music, favorite scriptures, etc.

In the second conference, counsel should be given to the bride and groom about marriage. Subjects such as family finances, the importance of religious faith, in-law relations, personality differences, and the physical side of marriage should be thoroughly discussed. The couple should be reminded that the wedding will last only about 30 minutes. Hopefully, the marriage will last a lifetime. Both need careful and prayerful planning.

In small communities and small churches, the minister is often called on to direct the rehearsal. It is preferable for a close friend or a paid consultant to be used. This allows that person to direct both the rehearsal and the wedding.

Never surrender the spiritual nature of the wedding service to anyone. You must provide all instructions for the ceremony.

Accept the fact that brides and grooms are nervous. Fainting is not unheard of. Rings are sometimes dropped. Vows may be misstated. Even the minister may make a mistake. A whispered word of greeting to the bride and groom at the alter can help them relax.

When possible the church should provide a bridal dressing room for the convenience of the wedding party.

Everything possible should be done by the church and the minister to make the wedding as memorable as possible.

Professional photographers should not make flash photos during the

ceremony. If there is any doubt, tell them or have the wedding director deliver the order. You cannot control wedding guests who have the annoying habit of popping up from a pew to make their own memorable snapshot even though it is rude and disruptive.

Increasingly, couples are having video records of their weddings. The cameras should be tripod mounted and available light is much preferred to spots or floods. We can only hope we do not see wedding guests bringing their camcorders to shoot between the heads of persons in front of them.

Take care that you understand your legal responsibilities. They vary from state to state. Your local county court clerk can provide you with counsel. Be sure you understand any domicile requirements about where the wedding license is to be purchased and where the ceremony can be performed. If you live in one state and travel to a different state to perform a wedding, make sure you meet the qualifications in the state you visit. Don't wait until you arrive Friday night after the court office closes for the weekend to find there is no way to qualify for a Saturday wedding.

It is a good idea to have the license brought to you at the rehearsal. The bride and groom will have many things on their minds the day of the wedding. You should not perform a wedding unless you have the license in your possession.

After the ceremony, sign the license in the privacy of your office, and mail it to the appropriate court clerk as soon as possible.

ORDER OF THE WEDDING SERVICE

Forty-five minutes before the wedding begins, the organist (or pianist) and ushers arrive. The music is played softly and the ushers greet and seat the people as they arrive. If several ladies enter together, the eldest should be escorted by the usher.

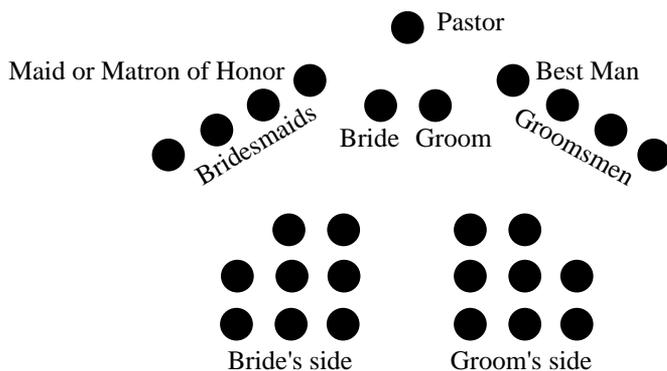
Five minutes before the ceremony begins, the candles are lit. They may be lit earlier if the lighting is not a part of the ceremony.

Two minutes before the ceremony begins, the father and mother of the groom are seated on the second row, right (See Diagram).

One minute before the ceremony begins, the mother of the bride is seated on the second row, left (See Diagram).

Divorce has become so commonplace that stepparents are frequently in attendance. Normally, stepparents should be accorded the same

courtesies as grandparents, usually seated near the front of the church behind the parents. If a divorced father is giving his daughter in marriage and his present wife is in attendance, she should be seated prior to the mother of the groom and behind the row on which the mother of the bride is seated. During your premarital counseling you should determine if relationships between divorced persons are such that an extra row should separate the father of the bride and his wife from the mother of the bride (and her husband).



If the father of the bride is deceased or divorced, the bride may choose a stepfather, brother, uncle, or even a friend to give her in marriage. Or, she may choose to omit this custom entirely.

At the appointed time to begin, the special music is presented.

After the special music, the minister leads the groom and best man and groomsmen in from the side entrance.

When the groomsmen are in place, the bridesmaids enter down the aisle, followed by the maid or matron of honor. Small pieces of tape on the floor may be used to mark where the attendants are to stand.

The bride enters on the left arm of her father. The mother may lead the congregation by standing as the bride enters. The bride and her father walk to the minister and stop. The minister makes some introductory remarks and then asks, "Who gives this young lady to be married?" The father replies, "Her mother and I do."

The father turns and is seated next to his wife, and the groom steps up to take his place.

The ceremony begins.

When the ceremony is over, the bride and groom lead the recessional.

An usher escorts the parents of the bride out and then the parents of the groom. Grandparents may also be escorted out if they are present, followed by stepparents.

The minister may invite the guests to the reception and dismisses the congregation.

On Marrying Divorced Persons

You must determine your personal practice about performing marriages when one or both parties are divorced. If you arbitrarily refuse, you will cut yourself off from ministry to both current and future members of your congregation. A better principle, I believe, is to help persons put their pasts behind them and find, in Christ, a permanent union.

A WEDDING CEREMONY

Introductory Remarks

While the groom, the bride, and her father stand before him, the minister says: “One of the most beautiful expressions of love and loyalty ever penned was first spoken by Ruth when she said:

Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

Since the beginning of time this kind of love has brought young men and women together in marriage. It is the kind of love (groom’s name) and (bride’s name) feel for one another. They and their parents are glad you came to share in their time of commitment.

The minister asks:

Who give this woman in marriage?

The father of the bride replies:

Her mother and I do. He then takes his seat next to his wife.

(See the end of this section/ceremony for alternate introductions.)

The minister then says:

(Groom) and (bride), marriage is a sacred relationship and should not be entered upon lightly or unprayerfully.

It is sacred, because it was ordained of God, who, in the beginning, having created man in his own image, realized that it was not good for him to be alone. So the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, and, taking one of his ribs, he created Eve. Having created woman, he brought her unto man and gave her unto him. Then, in the garden of Eden, the Lord performed the first marriage ceremony when he said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto a wife and they two shall be one flesh."

The sacredness of marriage also can be seen in the fact that Jesus attended a wedding at Cana of Galilee, and he chose this occasion to perform his first miracle.

The apostle Paul helps us to see the sacredness of marriage by comparing the relationship of a husband and wife to that of Christ and his church. (Groom), he says to husbands, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." And, (groom), there is no greater love in all this world than the love Jesus demonstrated when he died on the cross for us. This is the way the Bible says you are to love (bride). And, (groom), if you will do that, it will bring more joy and fulfillment into your life than any other human relationship you will ever have.

And, (bride), he says to wives, "Wives, submit yourself unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church." (Bride), this means you are to walk by (groom)'s side. You are to encourage him and support him and help him in every way. And the two of you walking together and walking with the Lord will find in this relationship the fulfillment and the completeness God intended from the beginning.

Taking the Vows

Inasmuch as you have expressed a desire to be united in marriage, I am going to ask you to take a vow—a vow that is made not only in the presence of your family and friends, but also in the presence of God. The Bible makes it clear that God is a witness to the wedding vows. I believe he is an unseen guest here today. He hears the vows you make and he intends that they be kept so long as you both shall live.

The minister asks the groom:

Do you, (groom), take (bride) to be your lawfully wedded wife, and do you promise before God and these witnesses, to love her, to comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her so long as you both shall live? Do you so promise?

The groom replies, “*I do.*”

The minister asks the bride:

And do you, (bride), take (groom) to be your lawfully wedded husband, and do you promise before God and these witnesses, to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him so long as you both shall live? Do you so promise?

The bride replies, “*I do.*”

Exchanging of the Rings

The minister asks the groom:

(Groom), what do you give as a token of your love for (bride)?

The best man, acting for the groom, hands the ring to the minister.

The minister then says:

(Groom), from time immemorial the ring has been used to seal important covenants. When the human race was young and parliaments unknown, the great seals of state were fixed on rings worn by the reigning monarch, and its stamp was the sole sign of

imperial authority. In later years, in the days of the legendary King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, friends often exchanged simple bands of gold as enduring evidences of friendships and good will. But today the ring has gained a far deeper meaning. It has become symbolic of a man's love for a woman and of a woman's love for a man.

(Groom), you will notice that this ring is a complete circle, without beginning or end. It is symbolic, I trust, of the endlessness of your love for (bride).

The minister then hands the bride's ring to the groom and says:

(Groom), you will take the ring, place it on the third finger of (bride)'s left hand, and as you place it there repeat after me, "With this ring . . . I thee wed . . . and all my worldly goods . . . I thee endow . . . In the name of the Father . . . and the Son . . . and the Holy Ghost . . . Amen."

The minister then asks the bride:

And, (bride), what do you give as a token of your love for (groom)?

The maid or matron of honor, acting for the bride, hands the groom's ring to the minister.

The minister then says:

(Bride), you will notice that this ring is made of the purest of metals. It will not turn or tarnish with age. It is symbolic, I trust, of the purity of your love for (groom). You will take the ring, place it on the third finger of (groom)'s left hand, and as you place it there, repeat after me: "With this ring . . . I thee wed . . . and all my worldly goods . . . I thee endow . . . In the name of the Father . . . and the Son . . . and the Holy Ghost . . . Amen."

The Pronouncement

The minister then says:

Now, by the power vested in me by the state of (the one you are in) and as a minister of the gospel, I now pronounce you husband and wife. And whatsoever God hath joined together, let not the hand of

man put asunder.

We will now bow for prayer and ask the blessing of the Lord on (groom) and (bride) and their life together as husband and wife.

The minister then prays.

The minister then says:

(Groom), you may now kiss your wife.

Recessional.

VARIATIONS FOR WEDDING CEREMONIES

While the core of every wedding ceremony should be essentially the same, i.e. a Christian message, sacred vows, and the exchange of rings, there is room for variety. The minister should strive to make each wedding as personal and as unique as possible.

Here are some ways to add variety to the standard wedding ceremony.

Alternate Introductions

ALTERNATE ONE:

The minister may say:

The most important thing in life is to love someone. The second most important thing is to have someone love you. The third most important thing is to have the first two happen at the same time.

That is what has happened to (groom) and (bride). They have fallen in love and have come to make a public commitment of their love for and loyalty to one another.

Who gives this woman to be married?

ALTERNATE TWO:

The minister may say:

*True love is not just something you feel, it is something you do.
Oscar Hammerstein once handed Mary Martin a poem written on a*

crumpled up piece of paper that expresses this truth. It read:

*A song is no song 'til you sing it;
A bell is no bell 'til you ring it.
The love in your heart was not put there to stay.
Love is not love 'til you give it away.*

We are here today to witness (groom) and (bride) give their love to one another in marriage.

Who gives this woman to be married?

ALTERNATE THREE:

The minister may say:

There have been many beautiful expressions of love given to us through the years. Jacob loved Rachel and served her father 14 years to gain her hand in marriage. And the Bible says concerning these years, "They seemed unto him as but a few days, for the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:20).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning gave us a beautiful expression of love when she wrote:

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

Sonnets to the Portuguese

And the apostle Paul gave us a beautiful expression of love when he wrote: “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of them is charity” (1 Cor. 13:4-7, 13).

Wrap all of these loves up into one and that’s the kind of love (groom) and (bride) have come to pledge to one another today.

Who gives this woman to be married?

ALTERNATE FOUR:

The minister may say:

One of the most beautiful expressions of love ever penned came from the lips of Ruth when she said, “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

These words express the kind of love and togetherness that ought to characterize marriage:

“Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge”—together physically

“Thy people shall be my people”—together emotionally

“Thy God shall be my God”—together spiritually

“Whither thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried”—together permanently

That’s the kind of love (groom) and (bride) feel for one another. And they and their parents are happy you have come to share in their time of commitment.

Who gives this woman to be married?

ALTERNATIVE FIVE:

The minister may say:

The first thing God named in creation as not being good was loneliness. He saw man, whom he had created in his own image, and said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

So, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and created Eve. She was not taken from the head of man so she could rule over him; nor from the foot that she might be trampled on by him; but from his side that she might be equal to him, under his arm that she might be protected by him, near his heart that she might be loved and cherished by him.

This is the kind of commitment and companionship (groom) and (bride) have come to pledge to one another today.

Signing the Bible

The minister may, if the bride and groom desire, have an open Bible placed on a table on the platform. After he pronounces them husband and wife, he may then say:

"(Groom) and (bride), would you now sign the Bible as a testimony of your commitment here today?"

The groom and bride then step to the table, each signs the Bible; the minister then says:

(Groom) you may kiss your wife.

Unity Candle

The minister may, if the bride and groom wish, have three candles placed on a table on the platform. The two outside candles are lit before the beginning of the service. Following the pronouncement of the couple as husband and wife, the minister may say:

(Groom) and (bride), the Bible teaches that in marriage two become one flesh. In symbolism of this, will you now light the unity candle?

The couple steps to the table, each takes one of the lighted candles, and together they light the center candle. They then extinguish their

candles and place them back in the stands.

The minister then says:

(Groom) you may kiss your wife.

As an Opening

The minister may, with the couple's agreement, have them turn around and face the congregation immediately before the beginning of the traditional ceremony. He may then say:

This congregation is made up of people who have played an important part in your lives. They are your parents, your family, your friends. They have come here out of a sense of love and warmth of heart. They are your roots, the flowering of your years. As you turn to speak the words that will unite your lives, be mindful of those behind you, and know that in good days or bad, you will never be alone.

Then have the couple turn to you again and begin the ceremony.

As a Closing

After pronouncing the couple husband and wife, the minister may say to the bride and groom:

GOD IS LOVE

May you have His kind of love for each other.

LOVE IS PATIENT AND KIND

May you be able to lovingly overlook each other's faults and weaknesses.

LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS OR BOASTFUL

May you seek praise for each other and not for yourselves.

LOVE IS NOT ARROGANT OR RUDE

May you give of yourselves for each other's needs and treat one another with utmost respect.

LOVE DOES NOT INSIST ON ITS OWN WAY

May you genuinely listen to each other with a willingness to be wrong yourselves.

LOVE IS NOT IRRITABLE OR RESENTFUL

May you be tolerant of each other's moods, always ready to forgive,

never holding a grudge.

LOVE DOES NOT REJOICE AT WRONG BUT REJOICES IN THE RIGHT

May you experience happiness because of each other's triumphs and successes.

LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS

May you seek to understand each other's differences, knowing you will stick together through it all.

LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS

May you always expect the best in each situation, regardless of temporary setbacks.

LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS

May you never give up your commitment to work on improving your relationship.

LOVE NEVER ENDS

May you spend the rest of your lives together enjoying His love.

GOD IS LOVE

1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 4

WEDDING RECORD

Name of Bride and Groom

Date of Wedding

1. _____ _____	_____
2. _____ _____	_____
3. _____ _____	_____
4. _____ _____	_____
5. _____ _____	_____
6. _____ _____	_____
7. _____ _____	_____
8. _____ _____	_____
9. _____ _____	_____
10. _____ _____	_____
11. _____ _____	_____
12. _____ _____	_____
13. _____ _____	_____

Name of Bride and Groom

Date of Wedding

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

21. _____

22. _____

23. _____

24. _____

25. _____

26. _____

27. _____

Name of Bride and Groom

Date of Wedding

28. _____

29. _____

30. _____

31. _____

32. _____

33. _____

34. _____

35. _____

36. _____

37. _____

38. _____

39. _____

40. _____

41. _____

Name of Bride and Groom

Date of Wedding

42.	_____	_____
43.	_____	_____
44.	_____	_____
45.	_____	_____
46.	_____	_____
47.	_____	_____
48.	_____	_____
40.	_____	_____
50.	_____	_____
51.	_____	_____
52.	_____	_____
53.	_____	_____
54.	_____	_____
55.	_____	_____



II

The Funeral



IMPORTANCE OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE

There are few responsibilities of the minister that present a greater challenge or offer a greater opportunity to minister than a funeral. In times of sorrow and loss many people look to God and are more open to him than at any other time in their lives. When the funeral service is conducted correctly, the minister becomes an instrument of God for bringing God and persons together. It becomes an important means of ministry.

In my years as a pastor I conducted more than 500 funerals over a period of 47 years. Like most experienced ministers, I have confronted every situation imaginable—babies stillborn, children dying of leukemia, young people killed in accidents, murders, suicides, men in the prime of life dying from massive heart attacks, young mothers dying of cancer and, of course, the elderly dying of old age.

Through the years and tears of experience I have learned that the funeral service is an opportunity to do three very needful things.

An Opportunity to Heal

First, it is an opportunity to heal the brokenhearted. That was an important part of Jesus' ministry and it should be an important part of yours (Luke 4:18-19). As someone has said, the minister has a two-fold task—to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. Funerals are important because they provide an opportunity to give comfort to the living.

The apostle Paul, speaking to the church at Thessalonica about the return of Christ and the role dead believers would play in that great event, ended his teaching by saying, "Wherefore, comfort ye one another with these words." The funeral service gives us an opportunity to do that.

An Opportunity to Give Hope

Second, the funeral is a time to proclaim our hope in Jesus Christ. For most ministers, the funeral service provides an opportunity to present the gospel to more lost people than any other single thing he does. Rightly conducted, it becomes an opportunity for both sowing and reaping.

An Opportunity to Honor

Third, it provides an opportunity to honor the dead and to affirm the value of life. The Bible tells us that we are made in the likeness of God. That fact alone gives dignity and worth to every person, regardless of who they are or what they have done. The Lord's first warning against murder was based on this fact (Gen. 9:6). G. K. Chesterton expressed it well, ". . . all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the king."

It is right, therefore, that we recognize dignity and worth through a funeral service.

The ritual, the friends, the flowers, the music, and the word of God all make the funeral service an important means of accomplishing healing, the giving of hope, and the paying of honor.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEBODY DIES

There are few times when your presence will be more needed and appreciated and when you will be able to touch people more deeply and meaningfully than at death. People will soon forget the sermons you preach, the buildings you build, or the awards you receive. But, they will never forget that you came quickly when notified of a death, and buried their mother or father, their husband or wife, or their child.

Being with people and ministering to them during such times builds bonds that last a lifetime.

What do you do when someone dies?

Call the home as soon as you learn of the death and ask when would be a convenient time to visit. Unless a specific time is stated, go immediately if possible. For many people, you represent God. Your presence will be a source of strength and comfort to them. And, they will never need you more than they need you then.

What will you say when you get there? I have ministered to people in times of death for 40 years. After 500 funerals I still struggle with what to say. A warm handshake, a gentle hug, a pat on the shoulder, and the simple words, "God bless you, (name)," is enough.

Words mean very little. Above all, avoid trite and empty explanations. Your presence is enough. It says, "I care." It says, "God cares." It says, "You matter." It says, "You are not alone. We are here to help you

through this.”

Listen. Let the person talk and make mental notes of what they say and write them down as soon as you get back to your car. They will give you important information about the life and the death of the deceased. Some of these things you will want to incorporate into the funeral sermon to make it more personal.

You need not stay long—15-30 minutes is sufficient. When the time is right, ask if you can lead in prayer. After the prayer, assure the family you will return later to talk about funeral arrangements.

Alert the proper people in your church, the deceased’s Sunday School class, deacons in charge of ministry to the bereaved, those who provide food, to make sure they know what has happened. Make sure the person is not left alone if no other family members live nearby.

Return later for a second visit. As you visit with the closest relatives of the deceased, you might ask if there are favorite verses or hymns they would like used in the funeral service. Usually, without asking, they will share with you interesting and pertinent facts concerning the deceased.

This time you need not make mental notes, you can write on a pad things they say. Sometimes I use the deceased’s Bible in the funeral service. Often, as you thumb through it, you will find passages marked, clippings from newspapers, poems, and even quotes you may want to use in the funeral service.

I once preached the funeral of a 13-year-old girl who lost a long and painful battle with cancer. Inside the fly leaf of her Bible were written these words, “The way of the cross may not be easy, but it is the way home.” I used that in the funeral sermon.

On another occasion I found on the fly leaf of an elderly lady’s Bible the words, “God may not give us an easy road to the Promised Land, but he will give us a safe one.”

Using such material gives the sermon a powerful personal impact.

When the deceased’s Bible is used in the service it may be presented to the family at the cemetery.

Though you will never get accustomed to it and never feel fully adequate, go to people in their hours of deepest sorrow and they will thank you throughout all eternity.

PREPARATION OF THE FUNERAL SERMON

At the outset of his earthly ministry Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from Isaiah the prophet, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 14:18-19).

If ministers today are to be true to their calling they must make Jesus’ priorities their priorities. And high on this list must be the work of “healing the broken-hearted.”

How do we do this? In many ways. We do it, in part, through ministering to people in times of sorrow and death. And, especially through the funeral sermon. This is no easy assignment for several reasons.

First, it is because we must deal with people in the most traumatic time of their lives. Second, death often comes with such short notice that there is little time to prepare the funeral message in advance. With all the other demands placed upon him and such a short time to prepare, the minister may be tempted just to muddle through the sermon. But, as Andrew Blackwood said, “Death comes but once, there should be no ministerial muddling. Our God is no muddler.”

Somehow, the busy minister must find time to prepare and preach effective funeral messages.

The one thing I did as a pastor that helped me most at this point was to develop a dozen good funeral messages that clearly and concisely set out the Christian view of death and our hope in Christ. Some of these were prepared and preached as regular sermons and then condensed and polished for use in funerals. By using this method I developed a variety of texts, illustrations, and outlines. Once prepared, I used these sermons repeatedly, choosing the appropriate text and emphasis for each occasion. Periodically I added a new sermon to the collection so that I did not grow stagnant.

By mid-ministry I had an ample supply of well-prepared sermons for almost every circumstance. Then when a funeral came in the midst of a hectic workload, I was already prepared. My only regret is that I did not do this earlier in my ministry. I think this approach would help any minister—especially young ministers.

Here are several basic suggestions that I offer concerning the preparation of funeral sermons.

Be Biblical

First, be biblical. The question of the ages was first posed by Job, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Through the years persons have sought to find an answer to that question in science, in nature, and in human reason. Ever since Raymond Moody’s best-selling *Life After Life* came out in 1975, near-death experiences have fascinated many Americans. To many people, accounts of near-death experiences bolster the belief that dying is not an end, but a transition to another realm, a place so blissful and love-filled that people who have approached it are reluctant to return to the earthly world.

The only certain word, however, concerning life after death, comes from God’s word. The only real assurance there is of life after death rests in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because he lives, we shall live also.

The poet John Richard Moreland expressed this when he wrote:

*The hands of Christ
Seem very frail.
For they were broken
By a nail.
But only they
Reach heaven at last
Whom these frail, broken
Hands hold fast.*

So, root your funeral message in God’s word as it centers in Christ, and you will offer real assurance and real comfort and real hope to people.

Funerals always bring the unchurched into the influence of the minister. Nearly every person has at least one Bible. For those with no church relationship, that will usually be a King James Version. I like to speak to persons in the context of their own lives. Using the familiar translation is one way to do that.

Be Personal

Second, be personal. Death is not a factory gate through which

people go in crowds. It is a turnstile through which they go one by one. Remember this when you preach the funeral sermon. It will help you to make the sermon personal.

The minister should take time to talk with the family of the deceased before the funeral and learn something about him/her. Every person is special and unique and by visiting with the family you can learn something about the birth, work, background, character, age, or family of the deceased that will allow you to add a much appreciated personal word about them. A few well-chosen personal remarks can transform a cold, formal message into a warm, personal word of comfort and hope.

A word of caution, however. Don't talk too much about the deceased. Focus mostly on Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our comforter.

Be Brief

Third, be brief. The funeral service should be characterized by orderliness, simplicity, and brevity. With music and message combined, the funeral service should not last more than 30 minutes. A well-prepared message can say all that needs to be said and can be absorbed by a grieving family in 10 to 15 minutes.

If we are to fulfill our calling as ministers, a part of which is to heal the broken-hearted, we must become masters of the craft of funeral sermons. Our ministry to the bereaved is too great to be taken lightly.

Identification, Not Transference

It is appropriate to identify with those who grieve. In some instances, you will conduct a service where you, yourself, feel profound personal loss.

*We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.*
—John Fawcett

But be careful that the funeral message does not become a place of psychological transference, a time to transfer your own feelings—especially something dredged up from your childhood—onto the family and congregation. You may need to find a trusted counselor to resolve your own grief, but for now, you have other work to do. You have come

to minister, not be ministered to.

Keep Records

Finally, keep records. Attach to your notes for each funeral message a record of the date and person's name for each funeral.

Inevitably, you will conduct funerals for more than one person in a family. If you know what you used for one, you have choices when you conduct another. You may want to remind the family of earlier content, or you may want to avoid repetition. Don't trust your memory. Keep records.

After the Funeral is Over

The wife of Duke McCall, retired president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and former president of the Baptist World Alliance, died several years ago. In explaining some of his feelings, Dr. McCall wrote, "After a church service, a well-intentioned acquaintance caught me off guard by saying, 'I am sorry you lost your wife.' Before I could edit my response I said, 'I did not lose my wife. I know where Margueritte is. I am the one who is lost.'"

Anyone who has had a loved one die knows how devastating it can be. It leaves you disoriented, distraught and lost. It takes us a long time to find ourselves.

The minister who is really interested in "healing the broken-hearted" soon realizes that his work is not finished when he has preached the funeral sermon or conducted the graveside service. Grief goes on and so must our ministry to the grieving.

What can the minister say and do at such a time that will be helpful to the family? There is no one dramatic gesture or pearl of wisdom that will dissolve the heartache, but there are many acts of ministry that can convey your concern and help to soften the blow that the person has suffered.

I offer several practical suggestions learned from personal experience as a minister who also wrestled with the awkwardness of what to do after the funeral is over.

Reach Out to Them

First, be there. For a long time I dreaded going to see people when

they had lost a loved one because I thought I had to say something comforting and I didn't know what to say. In time I realized, however, that words may not be the primary need of grieving people. Your presence is what counts. This is the first thing the bereaved needs above all else. Long after they have forgotten what you say they remember that you came.

Even a government agency like NASA recognizes the importance of being there. Following the fire and explosion that destroyed the Challenger space shuttle, the families of each of the seven astronauts who died had another astronaut family at their side soon after the disaster. The support families were there to help the Challenger families with everything from travel and food arrangements to boarding the family pet. "With all the vast technology of our space age," said Clark Covington, manager of the Space-Station Project at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, "there is still nothing more powerful than one human being reaching out to another."

Bound By a Thousand Cords

Second, help them understand their grief. Grief is a person's reaction to a loss. The more meaningful the loss, the more intense the grief. Many people, when they experience grief, wonder what's happening to them. When there comes a numbness of spirit, the loss of memory, the trembling of limbs, they wonder, "Am I dying, too?" When the tears come uncontrollably—or not at all—when they can't sleep, when they have feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, and guilt, they wonder, "Am I going crazy?" or "Is there something wrong with me?"

Actually, each of these can be a normal part of the grieving process, and it is important to help people understand that.

As in Gulliver's Travels, where Gulliver lay tied to the earth by the stakes and ropes of the Lilliputians, so the grief sufferer, too, is bound by a thousand emotional cords to the person who has died. These ties are not loosed easily or quickly.

A widower may come home from work at night and open the door to the aroma of his wife's cooking—though nothing is on the stove. If you ask a widow, she will tell you her husband is dead. But she may also tell you that she hears him in the kitchen at night, getting a snack as he often did in life. She is struggling with separation. Her husband is gone, but her memory is vividly present, and she misses him terribly. A widow may

continue to set two plates at the dinner table for months. She reaches out to touch him in the bed.

Spouses may even find themselves talking to their dead mate long after they are gone. The husband of a friend of mine died. In their 35 years of marriage she had never taken out the garbage. He always did that. She was putting out the garbage one day, and before she thought she looked up and said, "See what you've done Charlie. You left me and now I have to do something I never did before. I have to carry out the garbage."

Several years ago a teenager in a church I pastored was killed in an automobile accident. After the funeral his mother asked me, "Do you think it will be okay if I talk to Kirk?" I said, "Yes, I think so." Then I told her what the late Peter Marshall once said, "Those we love are with the Lord. The Lord has promised to be with us. Now, if they are with him and he is with us, they can't be far away."

Learn to Listen

Third, be a good listener. For most people, talking is an effective means of releasing emotions and undergoing healing. So listen! That will help as much as anything you do.

In their grief people may ask, "Why, God?" "Why did this happen to me?" Don't be a glib Bible quoter. Simplistic answers to complex questions are not only unhelpful, they can be harmful. Statements like, "This is God's will," or "God knows best," are theologically shallow and provide little or no comfort. It is better to hear their questions as cries of pain rather than literal questions.

And don't attempt to tell the bereaved how he/she feels. To say, for example, "You must feel relieved now that he is out of pain," is presumptuous. Even to say, "I know how you feel" is questionable unless someone has told you his feelings. I know how I feel about my father's death. I really don't know how you feel about your father's death. Learn from the mourner. Don't instruct.

Emotional First Aid

Fourth, let them express their grief. Grief resembles steam in a steam engine; unless it can escape in a controlled way, pressure builds up and the boiler explodes. Griefwork must be done. Griefwork will be done.

Eventually, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely, in a creative or distorted manner, the work will be done. So, emotional release should be encouraged. Comments like, “Be strong,” or “You’ve got to hold up for others,” tells the person it’s not okay to cry, to hurt, or to be angry; it’s only okay to “be strong.” Holding the person’s hand or putting your arm around their shoulder indicates that it’s okay to grieve.

One way to express grief is through tears. There is a Jewish proverb that says, “What soap is to the body, tears are to the soul.” Tears can help cleanse the soul.

Some people think that faith and tears don’t mix. They think a sturdy faith in God and the promise of life eternal are out of keeping with sobbing and a display of grief. But grief does not deny faith.

When Mary and her companions took Jesus to the town cemetery where Lazarus was buried, our Christ stood before the tomb, and the text states simply and profoundly, “Jesus wept.” Those simple words speak volumes about the inner feelings of Jesus and his reaction to grief at the death of his friend.

Seeing his tears, friends of the family remarked, “See how much he loved him!” In that incident, once and for all, Jesus refuted by his tears the notion that “big boys don’t cry.” He who remains history’s perfect and complete man stood by the graveside and wept.

Psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, following the death of her husband, wrote about her own tears, “The standard reaction to a widow’s tears is to say, ‘There, there, you mustn’t cry. Tears won’t help.’ But tears do help. They are a kind of emotional first aid. A widow will stop when she no longer needs to cry.”

What Can Wait, Should

Fifth, encourage the postponement of major decisions during a period of grief. When a person is in deep sorrow, they may decide to sell their home, quit their job, or make other decisions they will later regret. Grieving people need to realize that no matter how they feel at the moment, their feelings will change. Things will look different in time. So, whatever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.

Comfort the Children

Sixth, don’t ignore the children of the family. Children, because of

their limited experience, may not understand all that has happened when a loved one dies, but don't assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. Children do grieve and they grieve deeply. At such times the greatest gift you can give a child is an understanding heart. A child's feelings are worthy of respect. Jesus took time for little children and so should we. Equip yourself by reading on this specific subject.

Use the Lay People

Seventh, encourage others to visit and help. Among life's greatest blessings in times of grief are friends and fellow church members. They are often instruments of God's grace. Since a minister has many people to minister to, he should enlist, train, and encourage his people to join him in ministering to the grieving.

Deacons, Sunday School classes, and select individuals can be effective in this way. Some of them will have the gift of consolation. And they will have the time to reach out to the broken-hearted. They can drop by for a cup of coffee. They can take them to lunch. They can listen. And in time they can help draw the grieving back into outside activities.

They need not be trained counselors. As psychologist Bernie Zilbergeld said, "If you simply want to talk to someone, it probably doesn't make a lot of difference whom you select, as long as you feel comfortable and he or she is listening."

Grief is Major Surgery

Eighth, stay in touch. Grieving takes a long time. Exactly how long depends on the circumstances of the loss, the depth of the relationship, and the emotional makeup of the one grieving. It is not unusual for it to last a year or more.

Grief may be compared to recovering from surgery or the healing of a broken bone. God has built into the human body a remarkable capacity to heal itself. Many physicians will tell you that all they do is cooperate with and use the natural healing processes. But even with the body's capacity to heal itself, as suggested previously, it takes time for it to adjust to and overcome the effects of serious surgery or for a broken bone to heal. The loss that causes grief is major surgery. The healing takes time.

One way to stay in touch is by mail. When I was a pastor I made a practice each Christmas and New Year season of writing a note to each member of my congregation who had lost a loved one during the year. Holidays are the worst times of the year for grieving people, and Christmas is the hardest of all the holidays.

In the notes I spoke of my love for the deceased and my concern for and availability to them, especially then. It was a simple gesture, but it was one of the most appreciated things I did.

A good practice is to mark next year's calendar and visit the family on the exact anniversary of either the death or the funeral.

It Helps Them to Help

Ninth, in time gently draw the mourner into quiet outside activities.

Especially, if you lead them to do something for somebody else, something that helps them feel useful, you will be helping them. Activity is a crucial ingredient to the healing process.

Jesus is our model for ministry as well as our master. When his friend, Lazarus, died, he went and he wept and he witnessed—after the funeral was over. That's what we must do also if we are to help heal the broken-hearted.

ORDER OF SERVICE FOR A FUNERAL

The order of service for a funeral will vary some according to the wishes of the family of the deceased. Funeral directors often refer to a standard service as S.O.S., i.e. Song, Obituary, and Sermon.

A good order for a funeral service would be:

Music—a congregational hymn or special music selected by the family

Obituary and/or scripture reading and prayer and personal remarks about the deceased. I seldom use obituaries. Those present already know the necessary information about the deceased. Scripture reading and prayer and personal remarks about the deceased re much better. If a second minister is assisting in the service, this could be his assignment.

Music—another congregational hymn or special music chosen by the family

Funeral message of comfort and hope

Closing prayer by the presiding or assisting minister

ANOTHER TYPE OF FUNERAL SERVICE

Some ministers encourage families active in their church to have a private burial before a public memorial service. They meet members of the family at the ceremony two hours before the service. The family sits in a circle of chairs under the canopy and the minister asks them to recount what they remember most about the deceased. Some members share serious things and others share humorous ones. Sometimes they laugh and sometimes they weep.

After about 30 minutes the minister makes appropriate closing remarks, asks the family to join hands in a circle, and offers a prayer of hope and thanksgiving.

The body is buried as they go to the church or the chapel for the public service.

The reason that the funeral of a Christian should end at the church, not at the cemetery. And it provides a private and meaningful time for the family at the cemetery. In addition, in larger communities, it avoids long funeral processions.

WHAT TO DO AT THE CEMETERY

When the casket has been placed over the grave and the family seated, the minister may say: We have now done all we can do for our friend, (deceased). “We have brought his/her body to its final resting place. We now commend their body to the earth from whence it came.”

I read again from the word of God. Some appropriate passages are Psalm 23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 21:1-7, or Psalm 1.

You may then ask the people to bow for prayer and say: “This prayer will conclude the services.”

Following the prayer, shake hands with family members and move out from under the canopy.

By custom the minister stands near the head of the casket. Funeral directors almost always tell you which end is the head.

Military Ceremonies

If full military rites are granted, you can be sure a noncommissioned officer will be present to conduct this impressive ceremony. After the rifle salute and bugle taps, the military will fold the flag and present it to the widow or children or mother. You may open the graveside service, make your remarks, then offer a benediction after the delivery of the flag.

More often, a veteran may have an official flag on his or her casket without military personnel in attendance. In this situation the funeral director will fold the flag and present it to you. You may then present it to the chosen family member with the words: “(Name), I have the high privilege of representing the President of the United States in presenting to you this flag in appreciation by the Commander in Chief for the service of your (husband, son, father, brother, mother, daughter, wife, sister) in defense of our country.” Then offer any closing remarks and the benediction.

Masonic Ceremonies

Members of the Masonic Lodge are sometimes asked by the family to conduct the prescribed Masonic Rites. If they are performed at graveside it will lengthen the service. If at graveside you should open the service with scripture and prayer and then step back and let the brother in charge complete the service.

Bad Weather

In cold or rainy weather it is a kindness to ask men at graveside to wear their hats for the service.

SUGGESTED FUNERAL SERMON TEXTS

Texts for the funeral of a Christian

Job 14:14

Psalm 23

Psalm 73:24-26

Psalm 116:15

John 5:25-29

John 11:14-26

John 14:1-6

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Revelation 14:13

Revelation 21:1-6

Revelation 22:1-5

Texts for the funeral of a non-Christian

Psalm 1

Psalm 39:4-7

Psalm 46:1-5

Psalm 90

Psalm 103:13-17

Text for the funeral of a godly woman

Proverbs 30:10-30

Texts for the funeral of a little child

2 Samuel 12:18-23

Matthew 5:22-24, 35-40

Matthew 18:1-6

Matthew 18:10-14

Mark 10:13-16

Luke 7:11-15

Texts for the funeral of a suicide

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Romans 8:35-39

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

SELECTED POETRY FOR FUNERALS

Crossing the Bar

*Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning at the bar
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep,
Turns again home.*

*Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness or farewell
When I embark.
For though from our bourne of Time and Place,
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar.*

—Tennyson

God's Promise

*God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.*

—Author unknown

The Quest

*I sought Him on the purple seas,
I sought him on the peaks aflame;
Amid the gloom of giant trees
And canyons lone I called His name;
The wasted ways of earth I trod:
In vain! In vain! I found not God.*

*Then after roaming far and wide,
In streets and seas and deserts wild,
I came to stand at last beside
The death-bed of my little child.
Lo! as I bent beneath the rod
I raised my eyes . . . and there was God.*

—Robert W. Service

A walk with sorrow

*I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For what she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!*

—Robert Browning Hamilton

Bethlehem's Babe

*I know not how that Bethlehem's Babe,
Could in the Godhead be.
I only know the manger Child
Has brought God's life to me.*

*I know now how that Calvary's Cross
A world of sin could free.
I only know its matchless love
Has brought God's love to me.*

*I know not how that Joseph's tomb
Could solve death's mystery:
I only know a living Christ
Is our immortality.*

—Harry Webb Farrington

The Eternal Goodness

*Yet, in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings:
I know that God is good!*

*I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.*

—John Greenleaf Whittier
Rabbi Ben Ezra

Growing old

*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"*

—Robert Browning

L'Envoi

*When earth's last picture is painted
 And the tubes are twisted and dried,
 When the oldest colors have faded,
 And the youngest critic has died
 We shall rest—and faith, we shall need it—
 Lie down for an aeon or two,
 Till the Master of all Good Workmen
 Shall put us to work anew!*

*And those that were good shall be happy:
 They shall sit in a golden chair;
 They shall splash at a ten-league canvas
 With brushes of comet's hair
 They shall find real saints to draw from—
 Magdalene, Peter and Paul
 They shall work for an age at a sitting
 And never be tired at all!*

*And only the Master shall praise us,
 And only the Master shall blame;
 And no one shall work for money
 And no one shall work for fame,
 But each for the joy of the working,
 And each, in his separate star,
 Shall draw the Thing as he sees it
 For the God of Things as They are!*

—Rudyard Kipling

I would not die in winter time

*I would not die in winter time, when skies are dark and gray,
 When birds have flown to fairer lands, to frolic and to play.*

*I would not die in winter time when trees their glory shed,
 When earth displays its barren ground, cold and dark and dead.*

*May it be spring when I expire and breathe my final breath,
 When flowers in their colored tongue speak life instead of death.*

*When sunshine golden fills the air and skies are crystal blue,
and morning glory's fans are jeweled with diamonds made of dew.*

*For death to me is like the spring and not the winter time,
Like playful birds in chorus sweet, and not a doleful chime.*

*I would not die in winter time, or wrongful message send,
For thanks to Christ my death means life and not the bitter end.*

—Calvin R. Wittman (copied with permission)

The Hands of Christ

*The hands of Christ
Seem very frail.
For they were broken
By a nail
But only they
Reach heaven at last
Whom these frail, broken
Hands hold fast.*

—John Richard Moreland

So Brief Our Days

*So brief our days, so very brief
Like an autumn rose with its falling leaf,
A moment's light, a glance of sun
And then our pilgrimage is done.
As the rainbow fades in the summer sky
As the green grass flourishes to die
This moment's triumph, too, will wane
And none shall call it back again.
Write quickly, then, while the candle glows
A little while and the book will close,
Go carve your figure of renown
For soon you must lay your chisel down.
Use well this hour's joy, its grief—
For life is brief, so very brief.*

—Sybil Arms

The Stars Shine

*The stars shine on the earth,
And the stars shine on the sea
The stars shine on the face of God,
And the stars shine down on me.*

*The stars shall shine for a thousand years,
For a thousand years and a day,
But my Christ and I shall still live,
When the stars have faded away.*

Should You Go First

*Should you go first and I remain
To walk the road alone,
I'll live in memory's garden, dear
With happy days we've known.
In Spring I'll wait for roses red,
When fades the lilac blue,
In early Fall when brown leaves call
I'll catch a glimpse of you.*

*Should you go first and I remain
For battles to be fought,
Each thing you've touched along the way
Will be a hallowed spot.
I'll hear your voice, I'll see your smile,
Though blindly I may grope.
The memory of your helping hand
Will buoy me on with hope.*

*Should you go first and I remain
To finish with the scroll,
No length'ning shadows shall creep in
To make this life seem droll.
We've known so much of happiness,
We've had our cup of joy,
And memory is one gift of God
That death cannot destroy.*

*Should you go first and I remain,
 One thing I'd have you do;
 Walk slowly down the path of death,
 For soon I'll follow you.
 I'll want to know each step you take
 That I may walk the same,
 For some day down that lonely road
 You'll hear me call your name.*

—Albert Kennedy Rowswell

What Is Life?

*Tell me not in mournful numbers,
 Life is but an empty dream!
 For the soul is dead that slumbers,
 And things are not what they seem.*

*Life is real! Life is Earnest!
 And the grave is not its goal;
 Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
 Was not spoken of the soul.*

—Henry W. Longfellow

The Arrival

*Oh, say, "He has arrived!"
 And not that "He has gone."
 May every thought of him
 Be in that Land of Morn.*

*Arrived! To hear His voice
 And see His welcoming smile;
 And then to greet again
 Those he has lost a while.*

*Arrived! To tread no more
 The weary path of pain,
 Nor feel the waning strength
 The body feels, again.*

*To be forever free
From all that limits love,
In joyful service thus
He now may tireless move.*

*Then say not, "He has gone,"
Nor think of him as dead;
But say, "In the Father's House
He has arrived"—instead.*

Afraid? Of What?

*Afraid? Of What?
To feel the spirit's glad release?
To pass from pain to perfect peace,
The strife and strain of life to cease?
Afraid—of that?*

*Afraid? Of What?
Afraid to see the Savior's face
To hear His welcome, and to trace
The glory gleam from wounds of grace?
Afraid—of that?*

*Afraid? Of What?
A flash, a crash, a pierced heart;
Darkness, light, O Heaven's art!
A wound of His a counterpart!
Afraid—of that?*

*Afraid? Of What?
To enter into Heaven's rest,
And yet to serve the Master blest,
From service good to service best?
Afraid—of that?*

*Afraid? Of What?
To do by death what life could not—
Baptize with blood a stony plot,*

*Till souls shall blossom from the spot?
Afraid—of that?*

—E. H. Hamilton

To All Parents

*“I’ll lend you, for a little while, a child of mine,” He said,
“For you to love while he lives, and mourn when he is dead.
“It may be six or seven years, or twenty-two, or three,
“But will you, ‘til I call him back, take care of him for me?
“He’ll bring his charms to gladden you, and shall his stay be brief,
“You’ll have his lovely memories as solace for your grief.
“I cannot promise he will stay, as all from earth return,
“But there are lessons taught down there I want this child to learn.
“I’ve looked the wide world over in my search for teachers true,
“And from the throngs that crowd life’s lane, I have selected you.
“Now will you give him all your love—not think the labor vain,
“Nor hate me when I come to call to take him back again.”*

*“I fancied that I heard them say, ‘Dear Lord, thy will be done.’
“For all the joy this child shall bring, the risk of grief we’ll run.
“We’ll shower him with tenderness and love him while we may,
“And for the happiness we’ve known, forever grateful stay.
“And should the angels call for him much sooner than we planned,
“We’ll brave the bitter grief that comes, and try to understand.”*

Psalm of Life

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

—Longfellow

FUNERAL RECORD

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WHY SHOULD I BE AFRAID? HEBREWS 2:14-15

(Funeral Sermon for a Christian)

Someone asked much-loved Episcopal bishop Warren Chandler, “Please tell me frankly, do you dread crossing the river of death?” He replied, “Why should I be afraid? My father owns the land on both sides of the river.”

Death came into the world as a result of sin. And ever since it entered the world it has enslaved men in fear. Why should we be afraid of death? Because we have sinned and we are aware of it. We do not want to face God in judgment. Like Adam, when we sin, we try to hide. And we cry out, “I was afraid.”

It is because one is not prepared that he has fears. The Bible says that “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56), and until we settle the sin problem, death remains something to be properly feared.

The fear of death keeps persons from living, not from dying. The Lord knows that and that’s why a part of the mission of Jesus was to deliver us from the fear of death.

The author of Hebrews writes, “For so much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15).

Destroy and deliver! That is what Jesus came to do. He came first to destroy the works of the devil. The Greek word translated “destroy” (1 John 3:8) is the same word used at Lazarus’ grave when Jesus said to “unloose him” and let him go. It is the same word used by Jesus when he said, “Destroy the temple and I will build it back in tree days.” It is the same word used of the ship in the book of Acts that was about to break up in a storm. Jesus came to unravel, to break up, to tear down the works of the devil.

And, in so doing, he “delivered” us from the fear of death.

We cannot, of course, escape the experience of death but we can prepare for it. And because of Christ we no longer have to be terrorized by it.

Why does death frighten us so? Dr. Felix Martin Ibanez, M.D., who

was once editor of the American Medical Association Journal, said the fear of death is rooted in three things: fear of pain; fear of separation; and fear of the unknown.

How then does Jesus deliver us from these things and thus the fear of death? In three ways:

He gives us a new concept of death.

He gives us the prospects of a glad reunion.

He gives us an understanding of the life beyond.

It is Easy to Die

First, Jesus delivers us from the fear of pain associated with death by giving us a new concept of death.

Before Jesus came, death had a fearful, penal aspect to it. But Jesus' favorite word, indeed the favorite word of the entire New Testament for death of a Christian changed all that. It is the word "sleep." It is used 13 times in scripture.

What's it like for a Christian to die? It is like going to sleep. Imagine a man coming home at the end of a hard day's work, tired, exhausted. He washes up, takes off his shoes, leans back in his recliner to rest before supper, and nods off to sleep. There is nothing fearful about that, is there? No! Sleep, to a tired person, is a welcome friend. And that's what it's like for a Christian to die.

Eddie Rickenbacker was an authentic American hero. He first entered the spotlight as a dare-devil race driver. Then he became a legend as America's top flying ace and a recipient of the medal of honor in World War I. Later he became a pioneer in the manufacturing and development of automobiles and airplanes. He endured the most dramatic survival epic of World War II when his plane went down in the Pacific and he and six other men survived 24 days on a raft.

In his dramatic career he had many brushes with death. Seven times, he said, his toes were inside the pearly gates. Rickenbacker was a devout Christian. He was raised in a godly home. He said he had no fear of death because of his confidence that God had led him in life and had prepared a place for him in heaven.

On February 26, 1941, while flying over Atlanta, his plane crashed. For several hours he lay pinned by the wreckage in the cold rain. When

he was taken to the hospital he was close to death. He held on for three days, encased in plaster from chin to toe. "But," he said, "I began to die. I felt the presence of death, and I knew that I was going. You may have heard that dying is unpleasant, but don't you believe it. Dying is the sweetest, tenderest, most sensuous sensation I have ever experienced. Death comes disguised as a sympathetic friend. All was serene and calm. How wonderful it would be simply to float out of this world. It is easy to die. You have to fight to live."

Why be afraid of death when the fear of pain is gone? And Jesus delivered us from that fear by giving us a new concept of death.

I'll See You in the Morning

Second, Jesus delivers us from the fear of separation by giving us the prospects of a glad reunion.

In this world we quickly get attached to people and we don't want to be separated from them. That is normal. Death represents separation. We fear death because we dread leaving our loved ones behind.

But Jesus gave us the hope of a glad reunion and a greater work to do in the life to come. And that hope keeps us from being afraid.

In Catherine Marshall's classic biography of her husband, *A Man Called Peter*, she eloquently describes how dark the night of grief can be—and how bright the new dawn of faith.

During the summer after Dr. Marshall's death she returned to the summer cottage at Cape Cod, where everything from the boat in the yard to his old shoes under the bed spoke of him.

Seeking the solace of the sea, she headed beachward that first tempestuous, lonely evening. As she gazed across the water, she suddenly remembered the last words she had spoken to him. The scene was etched clearly in her mind. Peter was lying on the stretcher just inside the front door, waiting to be put in the ambulance. She leaned over him and he whispered reassuringly, "Darling, I'll see you in the morning."

Her last line is the best: "And as I stood looking out toward that far horizon, I knew that those words would go singing in my heart down all the years . . . 'see you, darling, see you in the morning . . .'"

That is our hope. When two people are Christians they never say good-bye for the last time. Our Lord gives us the hope of a glad reunion. Why should we be afraid of death?

I Have the Keys

Third, Jesus delivers us from the fear of death by giving us a new understanding of the life beyond.

Before Jesus came death was a mystery. We wondered what lay beyond the grave. What was out there? Would we know one another? What would we do? We would never have known, except the strong son of God walked into the grave and shined the searchlight of God into every nook and corner and came out and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, amen; I have the keys of hell and death" (Rev. 1:17-18).

The one with the keys is the one who has control. Jesus wrestled the keys of death from Satan and now he tells us not to be afraid.

What is the life to come like? He said to the thief on the cross, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." He said to all of us, "Out beyond is the father's house." There is still much unknown. Why didn't God tell us more? No words in any language can convey a true picture of the next life. Can you make a blind person understand what a sunset is like? Or a deaf person what great music is like? Besides, it would utterly spoil this life for us. If we could see it in all of its glory we would never be happy here again.

But we know enough. There will be no tears there. No death there. No sorrow or pain there. No curse there. Former things will have passed away. It is the world we have dreamed of.

With this assurance, why should we be afraid?

Many years ago, Benjamin Harrison who later became the twenty-third president of the United States, was asked to deliver an address at a funeral service. When he arose to speak he said, "Last night I was awakened by my little daughter who had arisen from her bed and made her way across the room and was stroking my face with her chubby hands. When I asked what she wanted, she said, 'Papa, in the great big dark of the night I am lonely and afraid unless I can touch you . . .'. In the great big dark of the night of life's bereavement, we are afraid unless we can reach out and touch God."

The land beyond the grave is dark and we would be afraid if we could not, by faith in Jesus, reach out and touch the father. But we can. And when we do, we no longer are afraid.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE? JAMES 4:13-17

(Funeral Sermon for a Non-Christian)

Augustine, one of the early church fathers, said, “I don’t know whether this is a living death or a dying life.”

Take your choice. We are all destined to marry death and each passing day brings the ceremony nearer. The pathway of our lives is more nearly marked by tombstones than by milestones.

Robert Alton Harris was right. As he stepped into San Quentin’s gas chamber he quoted a couplet from the 1991 movie, *Bill and Ted’s Bogus Journey*: “You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everyone dances with the grim reaper.”

The scriptures speak the same truth when they record: “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that he ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:13-17).

This text is a warning against presuming on tomorrow; on forming plans stretching into the future without a proper sense of the uncertainty of life and our absolute dependence on God.

All plans are wrong if they are formed in this attitude. We do not know what shall be on tomorrow. Our life is like a vapor. It is frail and uncertain.

“If the Lord wills” is the proper attitude. He alone can keep us alive and make us prosperous. He can thwart the best laid plans of men.

In all of this the writer gives us a proper view of life. It will help us contemplate that today as we mourn the loss of our friend. It reminds us of three things:

*Life is short
Death is sure
God is sovereign*

The Grave Awaits Us

First, to live right we must realize life is short. It is like a vapor. While former president, John Quincy Adams, was taking a walk one morning, he met a friend who asked, “How is John Quincy Adams this morning?” The former president replied, “John Quincy Adams is fine, but this old house I live in is getting pretty rickety.”

That is true with all of us. Time takes its toll on the human body, and life soon vanishes away. We, like every human being, can die at any time. There is a simple statement in the Bible about our physical life. The scriptures say:

“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of God endures forever” (Is. 40:6, 8).

Texas historian J. Frank Dobie said that as a boy in a one-teacher country school he memorized the poem, *Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?*

*‘Tis the flash of the eye, the draught of a breath’
From the fullness of life to the stillness of death,
From the gilded salon to the bier and the shroud—
O, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?’*

We must realize that death has a place in the total scheme of things. It is a sentence that has been passed on all humanity. Following his creation of man and woman, God warned against rebellion by saying, that in the moment it came men would “surely die” (Gen. 2:17). When human rebellion passed from the realm of possibility to the realm of reality, death entered the human story and God proclaimed, “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return” (Gen. 3:19). Man’s sin, then, is the source of death. And, since all have sinned, all will die.

Whatever path we take leads at last to the grave. Death is our constant reminder that we are humans, not gods. Whether a person lives or dies in the same community in which he/she was born, whether a person sets foot on the moon, makes little difference as far as the end is concerned. The grave waits for all. Medicine may prolong life and doctors may perform miraculous surgery, but we will at last die. The doctor always fails; ultimately, each patient will die. Life is a vapor.

A Blessing and a Curse

Second, to live right we must realize death is certain . . . “Life . . . appears for a little while and soon vanishes away.” How vastly different life would be if we could grasp the truth that it is like a vapor, and we have no assurance of tomorrow. The scriptures warn, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for no man knows what one day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1).

We do not know what shall be tomorrow. Isn’t it amazing that God has given us a memory by which to look back, but no vision with which to look forward? We cannot see one year into the future, nor one month, one week, one day, even one hour.

And, that is both a blessing and a curse. It’s a blessing, for if we could know the future our lives would either be filled with boredom or gripped by terror. If you knew the future, life would be like an old late-night movie you have seen repeatedly. You would know everything that is going to happen in advance and you would have a hard time staying awake in the midst of it. On the other hand, if you knew the future, you might be so terrified by the events that were to come that you couldn’t enjoy the present.

But God has given us no such vision. We cannot know tomorrow. We simply know that life is fleeting and we must be prepared each day.

Our Days are in His Hands

Third, to live right we must realize God is sovereign. Instead of presuming upon or boasting about tomorrow, we ought to say, “If God wills” we will live and work and prosper.

To acknowledge the sovereignty of God makes a difference in the way we live and the way we die.

There is a difference in the way people die. Lord Byron, who early in his life abandoned himself to the pursuit of pleasure, a year before he died wrote:

*My days are as the yellow leaves;
The flowers and the fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.”*

I cannot but contrast him with Adam Clark, whose commentaries on the Bible are used throughout the world. At age 84 he said, “I have

passed through the springtime of my life. I have withstood the heat of summer. I have culled the fruit of the fall. I am now enduring the rigors of winter, but at no great distance I see the approach of a new eternal springtime. Hallelujah!”

What makes the difference? It is Christ, and Christ alone! Spurgeon wrote of Christ:

*What the hand is to the lute,
What the breath is to the flute,
What is fragrant to the smell,
What the spring is to the well,
What the flower is to the bee,
That is Jesus Christ to me.*

*What's the mother to the child,
What the guide in pathless wild,
What is oil to troubled wave,
What is ransom to the slave,
What is water to the sea,
That is Jesus Christ to me.*

Halford Luccock tells “I shall never forget the story of a chaplain in World War I . . . a mass burial of eleven men out of one company. A rainy day added to the gloom. The company was gathered at the graveside. He said it was the dreariest day that had ever dripped from the canopy of heaven. He read the service; it was all correct and lifeless. Just as they were about to leave, a red-haired cook from Arkansas began to sing:

*There's a land that is fairer than day
And by faith we can see it afar
For the father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.*

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

—Sanford F. Bennett

And then Luccock said, “That was just a living footnote to a theological dogma.” If Christ had not risen from the dead, our hope is in vain. Trust him today and you’ll know how to live and you’ll be ready to die.

IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD? 2 KINGS 4:26

(Funeral Sermon for a Child)

Although we know from the day a child is born it is old enough to die, when it happens, it devastates us. Everything about the death of a child is wrong. It’s not supposed to happen.

We expect parents and grandparents to die. Sometimes, it is even a blessing. But we don’t expect children to die. As one broken-hearted father said to me, “Preacher, we’re not supposed to bury our children, they are supposed to bury us.”

But they do. And when death does come to a child, as you well know today, nothing helps. No words can take the pain away.

Somehow, when a tragedy like this comes, we must find a way to cope with it. That’s why we turn to the scriptures today. They, and the Lord who gave them to us, are our only hope for comfort and strength.

The Bible records the deaths of many children. One is the son of the Shunammite woman. This lady and her husband had often befriended the prophet Elisha by providing him food and lodging. Out of gratitude, the prophet asked if he could do anything in return for their kindness to him. The woman was childless and desired a family. And Elisha promised her God would give her a son.

In due time the son was born and grew. One day, while running to his father who was working in the field, he fell and injured his head. He was rushed to his mother and while she held him on her knee he died.

The woman instructed her servants to quickly saddle the animals and take her to the prophet. As she approached him from a distance he sensed something was wrong and asked, “Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?”

And she answered, “It is well.” We wonder, under those circumstances, how anyone could make such a response. Right now, you are asking yourself if things will ever be well again. You are feeling that the

light has gone out in your life and it will never shine again.

I want to suggest three things that may help you find light and hope in the midst of the darkness and despair you are now experiencing.

Live with gratitude

Look to glory

Lean on God

Life is a Gift

First, live with gratitude. Life is a gift, not a right. To see it that way changes our whole perspective. It helps us focus more on being thankful than on being resentful.

I don't want to be simplistic about this, as if a few words from the lips of a man could suddenly ease your deep grief and lift you up. But if you could see your child as a gift from God and be grateful for the time you had together and what the life and death of your child has taught you, what a difference it could make.

Then try to focus on the joy your child has brought you, the blessing he/she has been, on the influence he/she has had. Gratitude helps lessen grief.

Your child's life is over, and there is nothing you can do for your child anymore. Now the question is, what has your child's death done for you? Of course it has brought you great grief. I understand that. But it can do no more. Rufus Jones once declared that his boy who died had been a greater influence over him than all the others. Sometimes a child brings us closer to God. Sometimes they teach us things we would never learn otherwise. Sometimes they teach us to lean on the Lord.

Remember that length alone does not become the proper criteria for judging the significance of a life. Methuselah lived 969 years, but in his almost 1,000 years of life, the only noteworthy thing was the list of his children.

The artist Raphael died at 36, John Keats, the poet, died at 24; Frederick W. Robertson, the English preacher, was only 37 at his death.

Even Jesus Christ was only 33 when he died. His accomplishment is not judged by the length of his life.

We cannot understand why some people live such a short time. For them the flower of their life grows up for just an instant and then it is swept away, and we are aghast. But remember, your child who died was a gift and has left you with a legacy of memories.

We must remember that we, and our children, are like every other human being, and that means we can die at any time. There is a simple statement in the Bible about physical life. It says:

“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Ps. 103:15-16).

None of us are indestructible. Death is inevitable. Life is a gift and we must thank God for the time we had.

Their New Life

Second, look to glory. It will help you if you do not think too greatly of your own loss, but think of the joys of the children in heaven.

Try to look beyond the grief and the grave to the glory. So much of our grief is self-centered. Our tears are tears of self-pity. If we will think of the glorious place to which the child has gone, it will console us. A mother of a young lad who had died wrote a friend, “I hardly know how to tell you, but I have not told you before simply because I did not have the heart to do so, that our dear boy entered his new life last month. Only the thought of his rich and wonderful experience in these first days of his new life consoles us, or in any way makes up for the loss we feel in his absence.”

There is to be a future glory for all God’s children. “For I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). “Reckon” is a bookkeeping term. In the language of a certified accountant, Paul says he has added up all the columns and the sum of our destined glory far outweighs the sum of our present problems. The outcome is: the glory of our future life outweighs any glory of our present one.

There are times when our current problems so overwhelm us that we despair of a future glory. There are times when we question the progress by which we are arriving at eternity. Humility in the presence of divine providence is not always easy. We think we see too many inequities.

God has promised one thing: the triumph of his purpose to those who have responded to his call; he promises that good can be brought out of every circumstance (Rom. 8:28).

Grace for This Hour

Third, lean on God. I realize that the death of a child makes faith almost impossible for some people. How can God let this happen? As parents turn away from the grave of their child, they sometimes feel this question pushes its way between their clenched teeth. But, believe it or not, faith in the Lord helps. If you will look to him and lean on him and learn from him, he will give you grace for this hour.

John Albrecht Bengel, a godly scholar, once said, “When a pilgrim enters that better world, the door opens and a little breath of heaven always sweeps over those most closely involved strengthening them until their turn for the good, good journey arrives.”

We must never think that because God allows pain and suffering to come into our lives he does not love us. Malachi tells us that God looks upon his children as his most precious treasure (Mal. 3:17).

I remind you God lost his son, too. If you grieve because of the death of a child, remember God knows your grief. He has also grieved.

God often uses the rugged pass to accomplish his ends. George MacDonald reminds us that God will not force any door. He may send a storm to shake the house, crumble its foundation, blow in the window, but he will not enter until invited. MacDonald says, “Every tempest is but an assault in the siege of love.”

Joseph Bayley, who lost three children—one 18 days old, another 18 years old, and still another five years old—tells how he and his wife can never forget. And the brothers and sisters never forget either. His eight-year-old daughter said, “It’s like something pinned to the front of your mind all the time.”

If this is the way it is with you, then I would like to suggest that, right next to the ever-present memories and the images, you add this: the remembrance of Jesus, who died so that you could be sure of the love of God. Your grief will probably never go away entirely, but as you experience it you can also experience the reality of the love of God.

Psalms 103:13-14 says, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers we are dust.” God, who gave us his son for our salvation, is the father of all those who believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus and now, in your grief, go to that great father, who knows exactly how you feel.

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III
The Ordinance
of
Baptism



IMPORTANCE OF THE ORDINANCES

Never was there a person who seemed to care less about ritual and ceremony than Jesus. By practice and by teaching he emphasized a simple, direct, personal relationship with God. Born into a world where religion had been reduced to rules and rituals he emphasized relationships. He reduced the commands of God to two: Love God with all your being and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus did, however, leave two rituals/ceremonies for his followers to observe—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism was to be initial in our Christian experience. The Lord's Supper was to be continual.

The significance of these two ordinances cannot be overstated. These are not sacraments; to call them sacraments is to vest them with a saving power which they do not have. They are memorials, given to symbolize the gospel and our salvation. The Lord's Supper symbolizes what happened to Jesus when he went to the cross. Baptism symbolizes what happens to us when we go to the cross.

When Jesus went to the cross, his body was broken and his blood was shed for the sins of the world. When we go to the cross, we who are dead in sin, die to sin and we are raised to walk in a newness of life. Because these both depict the gospel, we will never outgrow our need to observe them. And, as long as we observe them in the proper manner we will never drift from the heart of the Christian faith.

Magnifying the Ordinances

As leaders of worship, we must realize that the manner in which the ordinances are observed is significantly important. Since our Lord left the ordinances to the church as a means of making sure the gospel message would be perpetuated, every time the church observes the ordinances in the proper manner, the gospel message is presented in dramatic purity. For that reason, we should magnify the ordinances as much as possible.

Make Them Central

It is best for the ordinance of baptism to be observed at the beginning of the worship service, whether the morning or the evening. It should not be tacked on at the close of the service. This allows it to be observed

apart from an atmosphere of being rushed and draws attention to its importance. It is worthy of our full attention because of its meaning to everyone involved.

In the same way, the observance of the Lord's Supper, rather than being added at the conclusion of the service, should be the heart of the worship service. It should be the center of attention rather than the circumference.

This means that the music, the order of worship, and the message should be related to this spiritually significant experience. The message should take the form of a meditation, 10 to 15 minutes in length, rather than a full length sermon, or a testimony by a layman. Sometimes the meditation may be omitted to worship through scripture readings, music, prayer, and then the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Plan Well

Always an effort should be made to create, both humanly and by the leadership of the Spirit, a sense of reverence and importance as we observe the ordinances. A correlation of the music, message, and the ordinances contributes to a more effective and meaningful worship service. This requires that the minister and the minister of music work closely in planning the service. Since we observe both ordinances often, we must strive to avoid sameness in the observance of both of them by adding variations from time to time.

BAPTISM

Understanding Baptism

The importance of baptism for Christians is clearly set out in scripture. First, Jesus himself was baptized, setting an example for us. Matthew writes, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and

lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"" (Matt. 3:13-17).

Second, Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized when he said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 27:19-20).

Third, the early church practiced baptizing from its beginning. After Peter's first sermon, this commentary is made,

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

Since baptism was commanded by Christ and is so prominent in the Bible, it must be important to every believer.

The Bible teaches three basic facts about baptism.

By Immersion

First, baptism is to be by immersion. The word immerse means "to submerge, to put under the water, to cover completely." Baptists are one of the few major denominations that still practice baptism by immersion today, and we do this for some very good reasons.

For one thing, that is what the word baptize meant in Jesus' day. When Jesus said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19), the Greek word that he used was *baptizo*. It meant "to submerge, to immerse, to put under the water." When the Bible was translated from Greek into English in 1611, almost all denominations were sprinkling for baptism. So, instead of translating the Greek word, the translators made an English word out of it by changing the "o" to an "e." It was changed from *baptizo* to *baptize*. If the Greek word had been translated correctly the verse would have read, "Go ye therefore and immerse all nations." Other uses of this word in scripture clearly show this. In Mark 1:8 John the Baptist said, "I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." He had reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Acts 1:4-5 makes that clear. "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not

depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” No one would suggest that those early disciples received just a sprinkling of the Holy Ghost. They were engulfed, immersed by him.

Another passage is Mark 10:35-39. James and John asked Jesus to give them places of honor in his kingdom. Jesus replied, “Ye know not what ye ask, ‘Can you drink the cup that I drink of?’ and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” What are the “cup” and “baptism” he talks of here? The cup is the one he had to drink at Calvary—the bitter dose of agony and suffering. He referred to it in the garden when he prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” And the “baptism” referred also to the cross experience. Would anyone dare say Christ experienced only a sprinkling of sorrow and pain when he died? No. He was engulfed in it.

For another thing, the biblical description of baptism depicts immersion. There are two detailed accounts in the Bible. They are the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16) and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38-39). In both instances these words are used: “. . . and . . . they came up out of the water.” These two illustrations clearly describe immersion.

Finally, only immersion depicts what baptism is supposed to show. Baptism is to symbolize death, burial, and resurrection. In Romans 6:3-5 Paul writes, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” If baptism is to identify us openly and publicly with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, it can best be done by immersion. We do not bury people by sprinkling dirt on them. We dig a grave and cover them up completely. So, we can best show burial by immersing people in water. In biblical baptism the water represents a grave. When a person is lowered into the water, it identifies him with the death and burial of Jesus, and when he is raised out of the water it identifies him with his resurrection.

There is no record in history of anyone being baptized by sprinkling until 251 A.D. This was the baptism of Novatian, who was sick. It was

called “clinical” baptism because it was reserved for the sick—those who could not be immersed. Gradually, through the years, it became a matter of convenience, and sprinkling replaced immersion for most denominations.

For Believers

Second, baptism is for believers. Many denominations today practice infant baptism. Baptists do not. We do not baptize anyone until he or she has come to a personal faith and open confession of Christ as saviour. Why do we do this? Because there is no example in the Bible of anyone except a believer being baptized. Look at these verses:

“They that gladly received his word were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13).

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?’ And Philip said, ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God’” (Acts 8:36-37).

“And brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.’ And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:30-33).

Do you see then the scriptural pattern? It is always “believe first, and

then be baptized.” Babies have no need to believe for they, yet, have not sinned. When they are old enough to know sin and trust Christ, then they are old enough to be baptized.

As a Symbol

Third, baptism is a symbol. It has no saving power. It does not wash away any sins. There is no magic in the water we use. It is the same kind of water we drink and the same kind we bathe in. Baptism identifies us openly and publicly with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. Romans 6:3-5 says, “Know ye not, that so many of us were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” And Colossians 2:12 says, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

Just as a wedding ring identifies us as married and a diploma identifies us as graduates, so baptism identifies us as believers. It is an open, public confession of our faith in Christ who died, was buried, and was raised again on the third day.

If baptism were necessary to our salvation, Jesus would surely have baptized people. But he didn't. John 4:1-3 says, “When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee.” And the apostle Paul would not have boasted that he had not baptized the people of Corinth. But he did. He said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1 Cor. 1:14-16).

Clearly, then baptism does not save, but it identifies us with the death, burial, and resurrection of the one who does.

Baptizing People from Other Denominations

Many Baptist churches re-baptize all who join them from other

denominations. Why do they do this? It is not that they doubt that other denominations are Christians. It is, rather, that there are so many different beliefs and practices about baptism among various denominations (baptism of babies, baptism by sprinkling, baptism for salvation, etc.). They find it less complicated to ask all who join their church from other denominations to be re-baptized. This saves them from having to judge each case individually.

There are other churches, however, that do not require everyone who comes into their fellowship from other denominations to be baptized. If the person has been biblically baptized (immersed after confessing Christ as savior) they are accepted on statement of their faith. They reason, “What we believe in is biblical baptism, not Baptist baptism.” If a person has been scripturally baptized, i.e. by immersion, as a believer, in symbolism of their experience, then their baptism is acceptable to God. And, if it’s acceptable to God, it should be acceptable to us. So they judge each case on its own. Since each church is autonomous and independent, that is its choice.

The Baptismal Committee

A baptismal committee is essential to assist the pastor in baptizing. What does this committee do?

Plan in advance to make sure the baptistery is filled and the water is the correct temperature.

Meet the candidates 30 minutes before the service and instruct them on the significance of baptism and the procedures of the service.

Take candidates to the dressing rooms and assist them in getting ready for the service. Robes and towels should be provided.

Print the candidate’s name legibly in waterproof ink on a nametag and place it on the left shoulder of the candidate so the pastor can read it.

After the baptism, assist the candidates in getting dressed and caring for their wet clothes.

How to Baptize

The minister goes into the water and explains baptism to the congregation. He may say:

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19-20).

It is in obedience to that command that we baptize today. There is no magic in this water. It does not wash away sins. Only the blood of Christ can do that. Its significance is in what it symbolizes—death, burial, and resurrection.

Before a person becomes a Christian, he/she is dead in sin. When a person is dead, they are buried. The water represents a grave. As a person is lowered into the water it symbolizes that they are being buried.

A person who becomes a Christian receives new life from Christ. The person being lifted up out of the water symbolizes being raised to walk in newness of life.

Baptism, then, is a way of proclaiming to the world what happens to us when we become followers of Christ.

(Two other introductions of baptism are at the end of this section.)

The minister should then look at the candidate who is to be baptized, and extend a hand. The candidate moves in front of the minister and stops. His/her left shoulder is toward the minister, his/her right shoulder toward the congregation. (If the minister is left-handed, the facing can be reversed.) A name tag or piece of tape with the candidate’s name on it may be placed on the left shoulder to help the minister with the name of the person being baptized.

The candidate cups his/her hands and holds them waist-high.

The minister’s left hand is placed under the candidate’s hands and the right hand behind the candidate’s neck and says to the congregation:

This is (name of candidate).

The minister then says to the candidate:

(First name of candidate), I want you to repeat after me.”

The minister then recites each line of the following pledge with the candidate repeating each line, as in a wedding vow.

The minister says:

I take God as my father . . .

Jesus as my savior . . .

The Holy Spirit as my guide . . .

This I do freely . . .

Completely . . .

And forever . . .

Amen.

The minister then says:

(Name of candidate), in obedience to the command of Christ and upon your public profession of faith, I baptize you my brother/sister in Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The minister then lifts the cupped hands of the candidate so he/she can grip his/her nose and the minister lowers him/her into the water and then raises him/her out again. Before the service the minister should have instructed the candidate to bend his/her knees as he/she is lowered into the water.

The minister may then say to the congregation:

And all the people said, 'Amen,' to affirm what they have just witnessed.

The candidate turns and leaves the baptistry. The minister closes the baptismal service in prayer.

Some ministers prefer to have the candidate fold their arms across their chest and lay them there. As the minister leans the candidate back, the minister, with a handkerchief in his hand, places it over the nose of the candidate and lowers him/her into the water saying:

Buried with Christ in baptism . . . and raises him/her up saying:

Raised to walk in newness of life. If this is the practice each candidate may wish to bring his/her own handkerchief into the baptistry.

Alternate Baptismal Vows:

After introducing the candidate the pastor says:

I would ask you now to repeat your baptismal vows as a testimony of

your faith. Have you turned from your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior:

Baptismal candidate responds, “Yes.”

Will you do your best to be a faithful follower of Jesus and obey the teachings of Holy Scripture?

Baptismal candidate responds, “Yes.”

If you should move from our community, will you promise to join a church in the place where you live and serve Christ faithfully there?

Baptismal candidate responds, “Yes.”

The pastor then baptizes the candidate in his usually way.

Variations in Baptizing

Sometimes the minister may say:

Spurgeon once said, ‘Christ did not come to make bad men good or even to make good men better. He came to make dead men live.’”

This is what baptism symbolizes—dead people living again. Then explain the meaning of baptism.

Again the minister may tell the story of the Ethiopian eunuch or the Philippian jailer being baptized or invite the congregation to join in a responsive reading from the scriptures that deals with baptism.

Baptize Outside

Occasionally plan a baptism outside in a lake or river if possible.

Let the people sit on the shores. Ask the candidates to join hands and lead them into the water. As you move into the water ask the congregation to sing “Shall We Gather at the River.” Then baptize the candidates in the usual manner.

An outdoor baptism can be a memorable event. Many people have never seen an outdoor baptism and they never forget this experience.

Let the Children See

If a children’s choir is to sing in the worship service, and if the children are seated in the choir loft, you may ask them to stand and turn around so they can see the baptismal service close up. As they stand

directly in front of you, explain the significance of baptism to them. When you finish baptizing, ask them to turn around and be seated.

Or in a regular service you may invite all children to come to the front and sit in the pulpit area so they have a prominent seat for the baptism. It makes them feel special and helps impress the importance of baptism upon them.



IV

**The Ordinance
of
The Lord's Supper**



UNDERSTANDING THE LORD'S SUPPER

The one incident in his eventful career that Jesus selected to be preserved among all others was his death. He made his death more important than his holiness, or his wisdom, or his power, or his miracles, or his teachings.

Let the world forget everything else he ever taught, but let them not forget his death. By his death the gates of hell were lifted off their hinges; the foundations were cut from under the kingdom of evil; the doors of the prison house of Satan were thrown wide open. It was a day long to be remembered; it was a deed never to be forgotten.

In what manner did he seek to preserve this one immutable thing? Not by tall buildings or shafts of marble, but by two unchangeable customs: eating and drinking. As long as persons live, they must eat and drink. He chose these two things as the means of keeping alive the story of his death.

All three synoptic gospels relate the account of Jesus' observing the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20). The apostle Paul interprets this event when he writes, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.' After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

ORDER OF LORD'S SUPPER SERVICE

The minister moves behind the Lord's Supper table and says:

On the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: This do in remembrance of me.

The minister then offers a prayer of thanks to God.

The minister then nods to the deacons who are seated on the front pew. They come to the table, take a plate of bread, and serve the congre-

gation.

While the bread is being served the organist or pianist plays appropriate music or the congregation sings a stanza of a hymn that they can do from memory.

When the deacons complete serving they stand at the head of the pew and wait for a nod from the minister. They then return to the front, place their plates on the table, and are seated.

The minister then serves the deacons and returns behind the table.

The minister lifts the bread for the congregation to see, and may say:

“This is the bread which came down from heaven: not as the fathers ate and died; he that eateth this bread shall live forever”
(John 6:58).

The minister then lifts the bread to his mouth and eats it and the congregation follows.

The minister then may say:

“In the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, ‘This cup is the new testament in my blood: This do you as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me.’ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.”

The minister then offers a second prayer of thanksgiving.

The minister again nods to the deacons, who come to the table, take the cups, and serve the congregation.

The musicians play appropriate music or the congregation sings a stanza of a hymn.

When the deacons have completed serving they stand at the head of the pew and wait for a nod from the minister. They then return to the front, place the trays on the table and are seated.

The minister then serves the deacons and returns behind the table.

The minister then lifts his cup so everyone can see it and may say:

“According to the law . . . all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).
“But if we walk in the light as he is the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The minister then lifts the cup to his lips and drinks. The congrega-

tion follows.

The minister then places the cup back on the table and may say:

After they had finished the first Supper, they sang a hymn and went out into the night. We will stand and sing, "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," as we leave.

VARIATIONS IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper lends itself to great variety in its observance. In every instance, however, it should be served with reverence and dignity.

Don't Forget the Elderly

Often, the Lord's Supper is observed at night. That was when it was originally observed. On Sunday evening churches usually do not have as many visitors as on Sunday morning. Generally, Sunday evening is more a church family service than the morning service.

One problem with observing the Lord's Supper at night only is that many elderly people are not able to drive after dark. So, at least once a year, observe it in the morning worship service. On other occasions you may ask the deacons to pick up elderly people and bring them to this special service.

Some congregations observe the Lord's Supper each first Sunday and have it twice in the morning and once in the evening each quarter. When and how often it is observed is a matter of choice for each church.

Involve the Youth

When young people have returned from a mission trip or a camp, you may use the youth to serve the Lord's Supper. You may ask a local bakery to prepare small loaves of bread for each pew. The young people move to the head of each pew, break a piece of bread from their loaf, hand the remainder of the loaf to the first worshipper, and say, "This is the Lord's body, eat it in remembrance of him." The people are instructed to break off a piece of bread for themselves and hand the remainder of the loaf to the next person repeating the same statement to their neighbor.

Serve the cup the same way. The young people hand the tray to the first worshipper and say, "This is the Lord's blood. Drink it in remembrance of him." Each worshipper then passes it, repeating the same

words to the person next to them.

Nothing in the Bible teaches the Lord's Supper must be served by the deacons. But secure church permission before asking the youth to do this.

Make Christmas Special

You may want to have a silent candlelight Lord's Supper on Christmas Eve. Have the church lit by candlelight and soft light. No word is spoken throughout the entire service. Print a message on the meaning of the Lord's Supper on the order of worship. Serve the elements in complete silence except for instrumental meditation music.

The service begins with the minister leading the deacons in procession down the aisle. The minister moves behind the Lord's Supper table and the deacons are seated on the first pew. Now, bow for a time of meditation. A Christmas hymn is played on a musical instrument, like a violin, harp, or the bells.

The bread is then served and eaten while the organ plays softly.

When the deacons have returned to their pews, everyone bows for a second time of meditation as another Christmas hymn is played on a musical instrument.

The cup is then served as the organ plays softly.

Everyone bows for a third time of meditation.

The minister then signals the congregation to stand and leads the deacons in recessional out the aisle.

The minister and deacons stand at the doors of the sanctuary to wishing the departing worshippers, "Merry Christmas."

Printed Program for Silent Lord's Supper

We have met tonight in obedience to the command of Jesus to observe the Lord's Supper. On the same night that he was betrayed, Jesus instituted this ordinance to commemorate his death for us on the cross. For over 1900 years Christians have met in services like this to remember Jesus' broken body and shed blood for our sins.

This is to be a silent service. Not a word is to be spoken. Please enter with a bowed head and a reverent heart. Begin to worship

immediately. Meditate upon the fact of the cradle, his miraculous birth, the cross and his atoning death, and on the second coming, our blessed hope.

Order of Service

Organ Prelude	Lighting of the Candles
Processional	Minister and Deacons
Moment of Meditation	“O Little Town of Bethlehem”
	The Serving of the Bread

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, ‘Take eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: This do in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor. 11:23-24).

Moment of Meditation	“Silent Night”
	The Passing of the Cup

“After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: This do ye, as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:25-26).

Moment of Meditation	“Away in a Manger”
Recessional	Minister and Deacons

Congregation will leave silently when the
Minister and Deacons have retired.

Postlude “Joy to the World”

Alternate Service: The Silent Lord's Supper also lends itself to an Easter observance. By changing the hymns the Silent Service outline can be used on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday evenings.

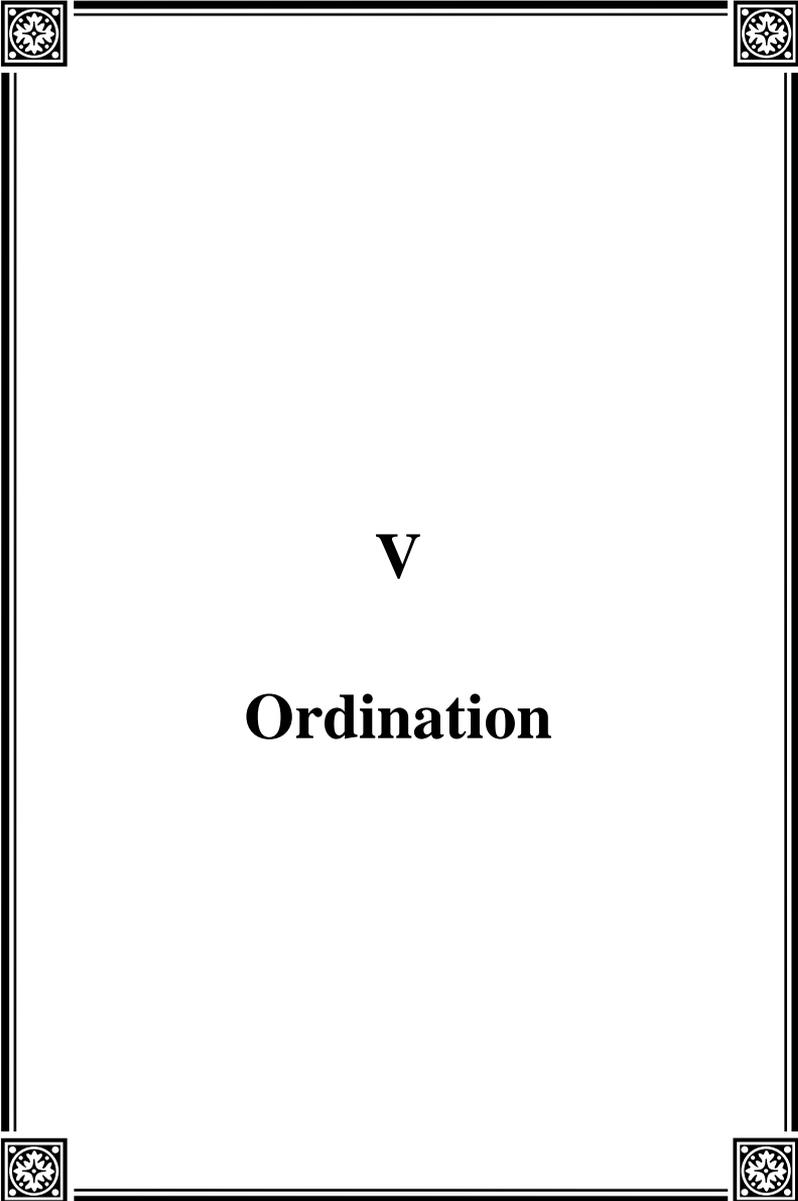
Help the Children Understand

Occasionally, in a regular service in which you observe the Lord's Supper, invite the children to come forward early in the service and sit on the floor and steps around the pulpit. Take an empty cup and a piece of

bread, pass them among the children so they can look at them and handle them and then explain to them what the Lord's Supper means.

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V

Ordination

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDINATION

Throughout the history of Christian religion there has been the custom of setting apart by formal recognition the official leadership for the churches. This is called ordination.

The purpose of ordination is twofold: First, to signify that the individual has decided to devote his life to the church's ministry; and second, to indicate that the church is approving and authorizing them to serve the church in ministry. Ordination is a recognition of God's call and the church's approval.

The Christian church inherited this practice of ordination from its historical forerunner, the Jewish synagogue. The rabbis were given a rather definite form of ordination. But, there is, I believe, a clear scriptural basis for the practice in the New Testament.

It seems rather certain that the definite procedure of ordination began with the installation of the seven as assistants to the apostles in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:6).

The several Greek words translated *ordain* in the New Testament mean "to set apart to an office or special service."

Three of those times it signifies formal induction into office (Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:1; 8:3). And in one instance (Titus 1:5) it has reference to a Christian office.

Where the word ordained is used for induction into office, it throws no light on the details of procedure. They do not describe for us the ceremony of ordination. However, we can derive vivid and valuable suggestions from the record of the ordination of the seven in Acts 6:3-6. In these verses the apostles assured the Jerusalem disciples that they will ordain the men selected to the task proposed. In verse 6 we are told they laid their hands on them.

The laying on of hands was a frequent and respected religious ceremony of the times, among both Jews and Christians. Thus we have sufficient evidence that this was the most solemn and significant part of the ordination procedure in New Testament times (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6).

These passages also indicate that ordination was a public and formal act.

The New Testament also furnishes grounds for the conclusion that

ordination of ministers is more than an interest of the local church. Paul and Barnabas supervised the election of elders in the Galatian churches (Acts 14:23). Paul sent Titus to Crete to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). And, we can infer that Paul and Silas supervised the ordination of Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). Thus, we must conclude that while the elders were ordained for service in the local church, they were not ordained as a function of the local church alone.

So, ordination of ministers is a function of the local church performed for the kingdom as a whole and the general interest of all churches should be faithfully considered in this important service. That's the basis for ordination of ministers including representatives from other churches.

Thus, we conclude about ordination:

- it was an open and public ceremony;
- it consisted of laying on of hands;
- both deacons and ministers were ordained;
- the ordination of elders was not a function of the local church alone.

From these scriptures we may be perfectly sure that ordination was a ceremony of installation that originated in apostolic times. But, beyond the public, formal laying on of hands, we must develop our own order of service.

The Necessity of Ordination

Ordination, of course, is not essential. Charles H. Spurgeon was never ordained. Neither was D. L. Moody. Spurgeon once said of ordination, "It's a matter of laying empty hands on empty heads." But we need some method of recognition and approval of those called into Christian leadership, and ordination has a strong scriptural basis.

THE ORDINATION OF MINISTERS

Ordination Council

The ordination council should be composed of ministers and deacons from various churches that convenes for the purpose of ordaining a person to the gospel ministry. It should convene before the actual ordination service. The local church can create the ordination council by invitation or make use of a council provided by its association of churches.

Order of Business of Ordination Council

The election of officers:

- a moderator to preside,
- a questioner to examine the candidate,
- a secretary to record the actions of the council.

Questioning of the candidate—the moderator should ask the candidate to take a chair in front of the ordaining council, where he/she will be examined concerning his/her qualifications for the ministry. The questioning, which should last between 30 and 45 minutes, is led by the person elected to examine the candidate. Among the questions that should be asked are:

- Tell of your conversion experience.
- Relate your call to the ministry.
- Share what you believe about the Bible.
- Relate your understanding of God.
- Tell how a person can be saved.
- What is a New Testament church?
- What are the ordinances of the church?
- What is their significance?
- What is the mission of the church?

Tell of someone you have led to faith in Christ.

Tell of your involvement in Christian ministry through the local church.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

What is your belief about and practice of Christian Stewardship?

What do you believe about heaven?

What do you believe about hell?

What do you believe about the second coming of Christ?

If this council should choose not to ordain you, what would you do?

The floor is then opened for questions from any member of the ordination council.

If the council is satisfied with the candidate's responses, a motion to recommend ordination to the church should be made and voted.

This action should be recorded by the secretary and a certificate of ordination signed by each member of the ordination council.

The Ordination Service

This service is held following the meeting of the ordination council.

Order of Service:

Hymn of consecration

Prayer

Testimony of the candidate

Recommendation of the ordination council to the church

Vote of the church to approve the ordination

Special music

Ordination sermon: A message of challenge to the candidate by a person the candidate has previously chosen. If the service is conducted in the church the candidate serves it may also include another sermon of challenge to the church.

The laying on of hands—The candidate kneels at the altar and ordained ministers and deacons walk by, lay their hand on his/her head, and offer a prayer or a word of encouragement to him/her.

A prayer of dedication

Presentation of a Bible that has been previously purchased as a remembrance of the ordination. It should be properly inscribed by the church and members of the ordination council.

Benediction

Hand of fellowship to minister and spouse

A reception honoring the candidate and family

Alternate Order of Service

Prelude: “Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him”

Call to Worship

Leader: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands,

People: **Serve the Lord with gladness: come before the Lord’s presence with singing.**

Leader: Know ye that the Lord is God: it is God that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture.

People: **Enter into God’s gates with thanksgiving, and into God’s courts with praise: be thankful unto God, and bless God’s name.**

Hymn of Praise: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Invocation and The Lord’s Prayer

Welcome of Visitors

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Micah 6:8

Hymn of Adoration: “To God Be the Glory”

The New Testament Lesson: Matthew 25:34-40

Hymn of Worship: “God of Grace and God of Glory”

Offertory Prayer

Offertory: "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

Doxology

Report of the Ordination Council

Presentation of the Candidate

The Charge to the Candidate

The Charge to the Church

The Ordination Prayer

The Laying on of Hands

Presentation of the Bible

Response and Commitment

Hymn of Dedication: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

Benediction

Minister: Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

People: **Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.**

Minister: To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

All: **Amen.**

Postlude: "Christ the Lord is Risen"

ORDINATION SERMON: CHARGE TO THE MINISTER

HOW TO BEHAVE IN CHURCH

1 TIMOTHY 3:15

General Norman S. Schwartzkopf, who commanded the U.S. Forces during Operation Desert Storm, speaking to an automobile dealer's convention in Dallas, shared two rules of the military. "Rule #13: When in command, take charge. Rule #14: When in charge, do right."

That is good advice for a minister. While we are never in command in the military sense, when we are in charge we ought always to do right. The apostle Paul was talking about “doing right” when he wrote, “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

The Greek word translated *house* literally means “household” or family of God.

The church is not a building, although it meets in one. It is not an organization, although it may be organized. It is not an audience, although it may comprise one from time to time. It is a family of God’s people brought together by their common commitment to Jesus Christ. It is a place where you can be nurtured and cared for in the Christian faith.

The Greek word translated behave means “to turn around again.” It has reference to the way we conduct ourselves, the way we *act* among God’s people. How ought a minister behave in the church? I offer five suggestions:

We ought to live with integrity.

We ought to labor with diligence.

We ought to lead with vision.

We ought to love with sincerity.

We ought to laugh with freedom.

The Most Important Thing

First, we should live with integrity. A minister’s integrity is the single most important thing they have. It doesn’t matter how much ability you have, if you don’t have integrity you will not long have an effective ministry. I have known many ministers with great ability who lost their ministry because they lacked integrity.

Vance Havner once said, “God is on the lookout today for a man who will be quiet enough to get a message from him, brave enough to preach it, and honest enough to live it.” That’s the way we should behave in church.

Laziness Will Kill Us

Second, we should labor with diligence. President Early Guinn of Louisiana College once said, “No other well organized vocational area is as tolerant of mediocrity in thought or performance as is the Christian ministry. And in no area is that mediocrity so well protected.”

You’ll find no encouragement to half-heartedness, laziness, or mediocrity in the Bible. Paul wrote to Timothy,

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

The word translated *study* means “to be diligent, to labor, to make a great effort.” The Bible commands constant zeal and diligent effort in handling the word of God properly.

Preaching is no easy assignment. William Barclay said, “There is no true preaching without the shedding of blood.” To Alexander Maclaren a prince among preachers, preparing messages was hard work. He often said he could never prepare sermons while wearing his slippers. He always wore his outdoor boots. Studying was work and he took it seriously. When you read his sermons, you can quickly tell that they were not “manufactured” between conferences and committee meetings.

To preach effectively and to care for the people of God is difficult and demanding. Laziness is a blight on our churches. If something doesn’t happen it’s going to kill us.

One Generation at a Time

Third, we should lead with vision. Leith Anderson tells of a preacher who was responding to the call of a church to be its pastor. He said that with their vote of confidence and support he thought he would be able to take the church into the 20th century.

The chairman of the committee, standing behind him, whispered, “Twenty-first century . . . twenty-first century.”

To which the preacher replied, “No, the twentieth century. We’ll go forward one century at a time.”

Many churches are behind the times and it is because they are getting no leadership from the pastor. As someone said, “Our preachers aren’t dreaming, that’s why the church is such a nightmare.” Tony Campolo was right: “Ministers are holding back the congregations, not the

congregations holding back the ministers.”

The scriptures say, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). The opposite is also true, “Where there is a vision, the people will flourish.”

On the anniversary of the death of John F. Kennedy, President Bill Clinton said of him, “He would dare us leave yesterday and embrace tomorrow.” That’s what the minister must do. Challenge the church to go forward and build the kingdom of God.

The Order of the Towel

Fourth, we should love with sincerity. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi that he hoped to send Timothy to them in a short while so that he might know how they were doing. He then said of Timothy, “He will naturally care for your state” (Phil. 2:20).

The word translated *naturally* literally means “genuinely” or “sincerely.” Timothy’s love was genuine. There was no pretense about it. It was not false or superficial.

“Honey” Fitz Fitzpatrick, grandfather of John F. Kennedy, was asked by a reporter what was the secret of politics. He said, “Caring about people. They’ll forget everything else but they won’t forget that.” That’s the secret of being a good minister also. As someone else said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

During the Persian Gulf War we learned more about Saddam Hussein than we ever wanted to know. One article described his wartime home. Hussein lived secluded in a German-built \$65 million bunker. The bunker housed incredible luxuries for a man at war. We saw him emerge periodically to make announcements to his people. He used strong god-language to reaffirm the faithful, to intimidate his enemies, and to maintain his own power. But he disappeared again, accepting none of the hardships is people suffered.

Some pastors are like that. They emerge from their ivory towers on Sunday to make pronouncements in God-language, but they will do no funerals, conduct no weddings, make no hospital visits, and spend no time in counseling.

In Jerusalem, a replica of the Upper Room has been built. Careful attention of every detail of the room was taken to make it exactly as it was in Jesus’ day. But, Doran McCarty suggested that the most important

symbol of that event was missing—the towel.

If the towel is missing from your life and ministry you will never behave yourself as you should.

Join the Human Race

Finally, we should laugh with exuberance. You should relax and join the human race. Some ministers act like they are so holy they would take nothing but St. Joseph's aspirin. People have a hard time identifying with that.

A survey was conducted to find out why people liked Chuck Swindoll. They gave two reasons. One, he gives us hope; and two, he makes us feel like he is one of us.

An Army chaplain told me he once met Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist who endured the atrocities of a Nazi concentration camp and wrote the powerful book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl said he observed in the concentration camp that those persons who were most likely to survive were those who retained their sense of humor. A sense of humor will help you survive the pressures of ministry also.

Above all, stay true to Christ. John Sununu, who was Chief of Staff under George Bush, was once asked by a reporter, "Your job is very difficult isn't it?" He replied, "No, it isn't."

The reporter thought Sununu had misunderstood him, so he asked the same question again. He came back with the same answer, "No, I only have one constituent."

He meant by that, he only had to please one person, George Bush.

In the final analysis, a minister's sole responsibility is to please our Lord. If you'll do that, you'll behave yourself as you should.

**ORDINATION SERMON: CHARGE TO THE CHURCH
RECEIVING A PROPHET
MATTHEW 10:41**

Some years ago I was seated next to Ramsey Pollard, former pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, on a flight to a Southern Baptist Convention. He said to me, “After 47 years in the ministry, it’s harder to be a pastor today than any time in my life.”

The ministry has long been filled with hardships, but never more so than today. It is in that context that Jesus said,

“He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet (i.e. because he is a prophet) shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Matt. 10:41).

Jesus was preparing to send the 70 on a preaching mission. His instructions were comprehensive: They were told where to go, what to say, what to take, and what to expect. They should expect rejection, arrests, scourgings, hatred, and even death. Then he reminds them that “the servant is no greater than his master.” He would experience those things and they should expect them also.

It is in this context that he issues this word of challenge and promise: “He that receives a prophet because he is a man of God will receive a prophet’s reward.”

The truth is the church must have its great orators, its dynamic leaders, its charismatic preachers. But we cannot all be prophets and preachers and proclaim the word of God. However, we can help those who are. And those who give God’s messenger the simple gift of hospitality will receive no less than the prophet. For as Browning said, “All service ranks the same with God.”

What does it mean to receive a prophet? It means, in part, to show hospitality and to help in ministry by providing food and shelter as the widow of Zarephath did to Elijah (1 Kings 17:9-24) and as the Shunammite woman did to Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-31). But it means more. We are to receive a prophet, not merely as a house guest, but as a prophet, as an agent of God with the respect and response that is due.

What does it mean to receive a prophet? It means:

To pay him adequately

- To respect him duly
- To encourage him continually
- To pray for him faithfully
- To respond to him enthusiastically

Help Him

First, to receive a prophet means to pay him adequately. When Dr. M. E. Dodd became pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1912, the deacons asked him what salary he would expect. He replied, "I never put a price on my services."

Most ministers I know are that way. They don't do what they do for money. They are motivated by God's call and a love for people. And most pastors, contrary to the thinking of many people, are not well paid. As someone has said, "When a church looks for a pastor they look for someone with the strength of an eagle, the grace of a swan, the gentleness of a dove, the friendliness of a sparrow, the night hours of an owl, and when they find that bird they want him to live on the food of a canary."

The scriptures make it clear, God has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14).

Churches have a responsibility to provide for the material needs of those who care for their spiritual needs. The apostle Paul wrote: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his reward'" (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Honor Him

Second, to receive a prophet means to respect him duly. The title "Reverend" is the official title for an ordained minister. It comes from an old English word meaning to revere. It literally means "worthy of respect."

Every true servant of God is worthy of respect because of the life he lives, the work he does, and the sacrifice he makes.

Few people realize the stress of being a good minister. Somebody said Jonah, the prophet, was swallowed by a whale and the modern prophet is nibbled to death by a thousand minnows. The apostle Paul,

enumerating the hardships he faced in missionary service, added, “Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28).

The minister who genuinely cares for people has a demanding task and deserves your respect.

Hug Him

Third, to receive a prophet means to encourage him continually. One of the great enemies every minister must contend with is discouragement. That is partly because there is no bottom line in his work. The minister often cannot see the good he does. Thus labor must be by faith. So the minister who is true to God needs the encouragement of God’s people.

About once a century a person is ruined by praise. But about once a day a person is ruined by criticism. Learn to be an encourager.

Hold Him Up

Fourth, to receive a prophet means to pray for him faithfully. There is a difference in a preacher and a prophet. The preacher can always say something while the prophet always has something to say.

Many preachers give empty messages because they have been drained dry and no one has been manning the spiritual pump of prayer.

The apostle Paul commended the Corinthian Christians for “helping him by their prayers” (2 Cor. 2:11).

The Greek word translated “helping” pictures a group of workers side by side working to lift a load together they could not lift individually. Together they get the job done.

That’s what you do when you pray for your minister. You help get the job done.

The most important committee in the church is not the budget or the building and grounds committee or even the visitation or benevolence committee. It is the prayer committee. And one of the people who needs your prayers most is your pastor.

Hear Him Out

Fifth, to receive a prophet means to respond to him enthusiastically. The worst thing you can do to a minister is to ignore him. I have long said, “I’d rather be ‘cussed’ than not ‘discussed’ at all.” I can assure you

of this, a pastor will succeed in the pulpit only if God's people give heed in the pew.

What then does a church owe its pastor? It should help, not hound. It should honor, not humiliate. It should hug, not hurt. It should hold him up, not hollow him out. It should hear, not hassle.

Why not adopt the petition of the late Senator Robert Kerr for your very own: "Lord, let me be a pillar of strength to hold my pastor up, not a thorn in his flesh to sap his strength, nor a burden on his back to pull him down. Let me support him without striving to possess him. Let me lift his hands without placing shackles around them. Let me give him help that he may spend more time in working for the salvation of others and less time in gratifying my vanity, or struggling with my indifference or repeated neglects. Let me strive to serve the church more and be happy as he serves me less and others more. Amen."

THE ORDINATION OF DEACONS

If a minister follows the right process, ordaining deacons can be a blessing to them and the church. What process should you follow?

Preach two or three sermons on the office of deacon using the classic scriptures found in Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:13-18. The minister may preach on such subjects as the spiritual requirements of a deacon; moral requirements of a deacon; the doctrinal requirements of a deacon; personal qualifications of a deacon; the ministry of a deacon; the marriage of a deacon.

Call the church to prayer for the following Wednesday night, praying for wisdom and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Let the church, by secret ballot, select the number of deacons to be ordained. Trust your church to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Let it be understood that all nominated must meet the qualifications before they are ordained. Sometimes a deacon selection committee is used to screen candidates and present their names to the church for consideration as deacons.

The minister and the deacon selection committee should talk with each person who is to be ordained, along with the candidate's spouse, having an understanding both will give full cooperation to the full program of the church.

In a church conference let the church select by vote those it wishes to ordain as deacons.

Set the ordination service at a regular service, possibly an evening service.

Use no outside help! The minister will have charge of the service and it should be a dedication service for the entire church.

Let the church know the seriousness of the service. Remind the church they are the ones setting the candidates aside. Let the church know they have a responsibility to these candidates.

At the close of the ordination service, have the candidates kneel at the front of the church with their spouses standing back of them. Let the deacons and other ordained ministers lay hands on these men or you may ask every member of the church lay hands on them. Close with a prayer led by the minister.

The younger church members and children should be schooled ahead

of time. The entire church laying hands on these deacons will have an effect upon the church that will long be remembered. They will feel the church set them aside, and the church will feel the same way.

After all, is it not the church that is setting these deacons aside?

Ordination Service for a Deacon

The ordination of deacons differs from that of a minister in several ways. First, more than one deacon is often ordained at the same time, while ordinarily only one minister is ordained at a time. Also, other churches and ministers of the local association are usually involved in the ordination of a minister. But the ordination of a deacon is usually a local church event.

The Ordination Council

This council, usually composed of deacons from the particular local church, meets prior to the ordination service to examine the candidates.

Order of the Service

The election of officers:

a moderator to preside,

a questioner to examine the candidates,

a secretary to record the actions of the council.

The questioning of the candidates, which should last between thirty and forty-five minutes, is led by the person elected to examine the candidates. The questions may be alternated among the candidates:

Tell of your conversion experience.

What is the role and responsibility of a deacon?

What is the mission of the church?

What does the Bible teach about Christian stewardship?

Tell of some person you have led to Christ.

Present the plan of salvation.

Share what you believe about the Bible.

Questions are then welcomed from other members of the ordination council.

If the council is satisfied with the examination, a motion to recommend ordination to the church is made and approved.

The Ordination Service

Hymn of dedication

Prayer

Testimony by each candidate

Recommendation of the ordination council to the church

The church votes on the recommendation to ordain

Special music

A message of challenge to the church and a charge to the deacons

The laying on of hands—The candidate kneels at the altar and ordained ministers and deacons walk by, lay their hands on his head, and offer a prayer or a word of encouragement to him.

Prayer of dedication

Presentation of ordination certificate signed by the pastor

Hand of fellowship is given to new deacons and their spouses by the church

A reception honoring the new deacons and their families

DEACON ORDINATION SERMON CHARGE TO THE CANDIDATE(S)

The highest honor a layperson can ever receive is to be elected a deacon by the church. However, no one should look upon the office as a position of honor only. One preacher said of his deacons, “We made an in-depth study of our deacons and discovered that half of them were too

heavy for light work and half of them were too light for heavy work. So none of them are working.”

It’s a sad day when the office of deacon becomes a place of honor instead of a place of service. The responsibility to discharge one’s duties in this office is perhaps as great as that of a minister when the matter is reduced to its final analysis.

What are the duties of deacons? In the Bible, the primary emphasis is given to what a deacon is to be, not what a deacon is to do. The inference is, if a person is what he ought to be, he will do what he ought to do.

Commonly, the functional service of the deacons has been traced to Acts 6:1-7. From this passage we get a glimpse of three things deacons are to do:

Be assistants to the pastor

Be servants to the church

Be witnesses to the world

Killing the Pastor

First, deacons are to be assistants to the pastor. One problem with the ministry today is over-business. Pastors are pulled in so many directions they don’t have time to pray and preach as they should.

J. Sidlow Baxter said, “I believe when most Baptist churches call a new pastor, the people band together and say, ‘Behold, a new pastor; come, let us kill him.’”

A killing workload is no new thing. The New Testament church, following Pentecost, experienced great growth. The generosity of people like Barnabas (Acts 5) was unbounded. So great were the needs of the congregation and so generous were the gifts, that the apostles became so occupied in the distribution of good that they were neglecting what they regarded to be their primary responsibilities of prayer and preaching—their spiritual ministry.

They led the church to select the first deacons to take some of the practical responsibilities from the shoulders of the apostles so they would have time to pray and prepare and preach. Thus, the deacon was and is to be an assistant to the minister.

Kicking Up Dust

Second, deacons are to be servants to the congregation. What is the nature of the service of a deacon? The nature may vary from church to church and from time to time. However it should include such things as: ministering to the sick; ministering to the bereaved; visiting the unsaved; visiting the unaffiliated; building the Christian fellowship; welcoming new members; performing acts of benevolence; administering the ordinances; promoting family worship.

The Greek verb *diakoneo* from which the noun “deacon” comes meant “to serve.” The word literally meant “through dust.” Although the origin of the word is unknown, the concept of raising dust suggests a servant hastening to serve or wait on his master.

The deacon is a servant. He will do whatever needs to be done.

Keeping Them Happy

Third, deacons are to be witnesses to the world. The selection of the first deacons “pleased the whole multitude.” A church that was in conflict was suddenly happy again. A church on the verge of splitting was reunited in love and purpose. And as a result, many were added to the church because of the witness of these good men.

The importance of unity cannot be overstated. The Lord cannot work effectively in a church that is at civil war. Baptists are notorious for their fights and deacons are noted for being the center of controversy. I remind you, you were elected to solve problems, not create them.

As a result of what happens here, may the pastor have an assistant, the congregation have a servant, and the world have a witness.

DEACON ORDINATION SERMON CHARGE TO THE CHURCH

George Bernard Shaw once said, “Power does not corrupt a man; fools, however, if they get into a position of power, corrupt power.”

Any person ordained in any position of the church needs the wisdom not to abuse power, but rather to use it as a means of serving God and serving his people.

As a deacon has a responsibility to the church, the church also has a responsibility to the deacon. The church’s obligation to its deacons is

three-fold:

- To pray for them
- To encourage them
- To follow them.

You Can Depend on It

First, the church should pray for its deacons. The New Testament church was born out of prayer. Following the ascension of our Lord, the disciples, 120 in number, gathered in the upper room and began to pray. They prayed until the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. As a result of the moving of the Spirit of God, Peter preached and 3,000 souls were added to the church that day.

As the church was born out of prayer, so it goes forward on the wings of prayer. There is nothing more important you can do for a person, especially a deacon, than to pray for him.

Someone has said, "If you depend on organization, you get what organization can do; if you depend on money, you get what money can do; if you depend on education, you get what education can do; if you depend on promotion, you get what promotion can do; if you depend on prayer, you get what God can do."

We desperately want what God can do. Pray for these deacons.

You Can Live on It

Second, the church should encourage its deacons. Being an assistant to the minister, and a servant to the church, and a witness to the world is not an easy or even an enviable responsibility. They will spend long hours fulfilling their responsibilities. They will wrestle with hard problems in the congregation. They will receive criticism. And, they will need your encouragement.

One of Satan's primary tools in ministry is discouragement. If he can drive the wedge of discouragement into our Christian commitment and service, he has won a major victory.

Mark Twain once said, "I can live three months on one good compliment." There is enough discouragement in the world without our adding to it. May God grant that all of us will be encouragers.

You Can Act on It

Third, the church should follow the leadership of its deacons. The deacon is a servant leader. They have no authority except that which is given to them by the church. And we are not to follow anyone blindly. But when they offer a proposal, we should give it prayerful and careful consideration. We should understand they have access to facts we may not have. Usually they have discussed and prayed over the matter thoroughly. Most of the time they will be right. And we should follow their recommendation.

Some of God's gifts to his church are gifted leaders. A church is blessed to have a deacon body that loves and serves him as well as the congregation. Our duty is to pray for them, encourage them, and follow them.

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