1. *This or That? The Tension between Two Mandates in Christian Mission* by David Allen Bledsoe


22. *Word and Deed as Effective Mission Strategy* by Pat Meloncon

34. *God’s Gas Station: The Mission Arlington® Story* by Jim Burgin and Tillie Burgin

44. *A God Thing: An Ordinary Preacher Follows an Extraordinary God to Reach the Least of These* by Charles Roesel and Samuel Smith

56. *Evangelism and Social Ministries at New Hope Baptist Mission* by John Rech

70. *Love One Another, as I Have Loved You* by Barbara Akins


90. *Vance Houston Havner October 17, 1901 – August 1, 1986* by Bob Pitman

102. *Teaching Them to Obey: The Great Commission and Discipleship* by Chuck Lawless

116. Book Reviews
“This generation of students is different than ours. They want to make a difference. They are extremely concerned about social justice.”

While on my recent state-side assignment, I conversed with multiple professors and other denominational leaders about the pool of missionary and pastoral candidates who are either entering or recently have finished their seminary experience. As a sort of outsider, I sensed the need to rely upon the perceptions of my colleagues about current trends and profiles. They repeatedly stressed: “This generation of students is different than ours. They want to make a difference. They are extremely concerned about social justice.”

I quietly pondered this often-mentioned comment. First, social transformation through social action/ministry was rich history of demonstrating compassion has been forgotten; there has been the starting of a plethora of hospitals, funding homeless shelters and schools, the digging of wells, providing of aid, advocating for the oppressed, and engaging in civic life since the beginning of the eighteenth century—not to mention the first two centuries of the early church. Third, I saw the benefit for leaders, current and future, to reflect on forty years of discussions which already have taken place by mission-minded evangelicals on this topic.

In this article through declarations and examples primarily taken from the Lausanne movement, I hope to introduce the reader to the relationship and frequent tension between evangelism and social engagement.
This is a continuing tension in ministry and evangelism.

**DEFINING THE MANDATES**

The biblical directives related to social ministry/action and evangelism typically have been known in mission circles as the cultural and evangelistic mandates. Both merit definition.

The cultural mandate refers to the social responsibility of the church and the fulfillment of “let your light shine before men” (Matt. 5:16). It ties to the second part of the Great Commandment of loving one’s fellow human. Love is seen as a biblical duty of God’s people in the law, emphasized by Jesus and the apostles, and exemplified by the NT churches.

The evangelistic mandate refers to reconciling men and women who are alienated from God with the gospel of Jesus. It is what is implied in the name evangelism; that is, sharing the gospel so people can be saved. This mandate also has its grounding in the Scriptures, especially in the NT, which encompasses the grand narrative of God’s desire and activity of reconciling the world to Himself.

**DECIDING THE PRIORITIES**

Both mandates obviously have their basis in the Scriptures. For this reason, rarely has one voiced opposition to either. The question, however, arises as to which mandate should receive priority. C. Peter Wagner (1989:102) summarized five major positions held by most churches and believers in relation to priority. I take the liberty of labeling each one.

+C The church’s mission centers on demonstrating God’s love through deeds such as helping the hurting and social engagement, not proselytizing; thus, the cultural mandate is the sole priority.

C/E Even though evangelism is noteworthy, the church’s priority and attention lie with the cultural mandate.

C+E Both mandates are equally important and neither should be prioritized over the other.

+E/C- Although social ministry deserves attention, the church should prioritize the evangelistic mandate.

+E Evangelism is the sole priority of the church. Social ministry may be a supportive activity, but the church’s mission is eternal; therefore, it should focus on winning souls and perfecting them.

As stated, the above delineates the priorities held by most
believers and churches. Before proceeding to the next section, I propose that the reader respond to the following question. Which position do you see as being the most honoring to God and consistent for biblical Christian mission?

**DELIBERATING WITHIN EVANGELICALISM**

One of the foremost venues for discussions on missions for evangelicals in the last fifty years has been the Lausanne Movement (i.e., LM). The LM promotes world evangelization and informs the global church of trends and challenges which need confrontation, understanding, and responses. Different from previous gatherings on missions such as the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference and subsequent World Council of Churches’ missions conferences, evangelicals, and not ecumenicals, have determined the agenda of the LM, although ecumenicals indeed have participated. The LM came about in response to a “social gospel” view of missions, non-evangelical tenets that threatened the future of evangelical missions, and the concern voiced principally by Evangelist Billy Graham that evangelistic commitment of the global church was in jeopardy of continuance.

Since the LM’s beginning, these two mandates, and what combination of the two should have priority, have been significant topics in the three world congresses and subsequent working groups. In fact, this subject has been the most passionate and frustrating issue for many participants and leaders, depending on which mandate they hold most important. However, reflections on this subject provide sound, biblical guidance for evangelical missions, past and future. I glean statements from each of the LM’s three primary documents as well as significant leaders from within the movement itself.

The *Lausanne Covenant* (LM 1974: section 6) states, “In the Church’s mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.” In addition, it declares:

Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex, or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and
social concern as mutually exclusive (LM 1974: section 5).

The Manila Manifesto likewise regards evangelism as the primary purpose for the church’s mission, yet it holds social justice and alleviation of suffering to be necessary as well.

Evangelism is primary because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its arrival by works of mercy and power. We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds. In a spirit of humility we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped, and deliver the oppressed. While we acknowledge the diversity of spiritual gifts, callings, and contexts, we also affirm that good news and good works are inseparable.

The third global gathering for the LM occurred in October 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa. I had the honor of participating, along with over 4,100 leaders from 198 nations. The resultant document, the Cape Town Commitment, concluded:

We discern the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in these two challenges [i.e. two mandates] because they correspond to two of Christ’s most emphatic words to the Church as recorded in the gospels. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gave us our primary mandate— to make disciples among all nations. In John’s Gospel, Jesus gave us our primary method— to love one another so that the world will know we are disciples of Jesus. We should not be surprised, but rather rejoice to hear the Master’s voice, when Christ says the same things 2,000 years later to his people gathered from all around the world. Make disciples. Love one another.

In his Cape Town 2010 plenary, John Piper challenged the participants and summarized best what I believe is a healthy concern for the two mandates.

Could Lausanne say this? Could the global church say this? For Christ’s sake, we
Christians care about all suffering—especially eternal suffering. I don’t want you to choose between these two truths. Christ doesn’t want you to choose between [the alleviation of suffering and the correcting of injustices on this earth vs. helping people to escape eternal suffering in hell]. . . Christ is calling us to pull these together. If there rises in your heart a resistance to the phrase “especially eternal suffering” or if there rises in your heart a resistance to the phrase “we care about all suffering now” if resistance rises to either one of those, either we [sic] have a defective view of hell or a defective heart (John Piper 2010).

Attempting to summarize the consensus of the LM, the priority lies with the evangelistic mandate. However, the cultural mandate stands as an integral part of mission and not a mere tack-on to evangelism (e.g., means to gain access into countries which are closed to Christian missionaries). Although this summary may seem a paradox and hard to categorize in one of Wagner’s five commonly held positions, it shows that the Gospel can and should be central to any dimension of Christian mission that God’s people engage (Wright 2010:109-110).

**DEMONSTRATING THROUGH EXAMPLES**

**The Early Church**

Two of the great hallmarks of the early Christian church were its charity and chastity (Kane 1982:24-25). No doubt, believers who converted from Judaism and paganism spread their faith wherever they went; Christianity truly was a lay movement. Nevertheless, they dually showed Christ’s love, both within and without their Christian communities, through serving the afflicted and engaging in civic life. Their acts touched prisoners, slaves, the infirmed, the poor, the orphans, and the unemployed. In fact, they were noted for their sacrificial service through burying the dead, ministering to the sick, and feeding the starving during the widespread plague which vexed Rome in the fourth century (in Kane 1982:25).

**Two Contemporary Leaders in Mission**

Two leaders in missions exemplify this Gospel-centered fulfillment of Christian mission through their credence to both mandates. One does so through
his global ministry, and the other seemed philosophically to arrive to this point at the end of his life. It is interesting that both have contributed to the LM in their own right.

Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham, continues the evangelistic emphasis of his father by preaching crusades worldwide and leading the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He also serves as president for Samaritan’s Purse, one of the largest non-denominational organizations to the impoverished, providing relief assistance and development programs. During a trip to Haiti in 2011, I observed the sheer visible presence of Samaritan’s Purse in terms of relief, trailing only behind the United Nations (UNICEF) and U.S. aid. Graham clearly articulates that his life and ministry center on the gospel, which he displays in word and deed.

Missiologist Ralph Winter (2010:164), in one of his last essays before dying, proposed “a more balanced approach” to missions rather than merely emphasizing evangelism and church planting, which he noted was the emphasis of twentieth-century missions. I found this statement shocking as it came from the same individual who formerly believed that missions primarily was reaching unreached people groups (UPG’s). In fact, Winter’s missiology on UPG’s profoundly influenced the philosophy and strategy of many contemporary mission organizations, including the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Nonetheless, his new plan which he termed Empowered Evangelism, called for large-scale initiatives by the global church to eradicate diseases, resolve poverty, and integrate into civic life. He saw the cultural mandate as fundamental for believers to fulfill their role of producing good works and glorifying God as well as authenticating the gospel, which he believed would lead to more effective results in evangelization.

Personal Ministry in Brazil

With Brazil’s obvious problems of poverty, homelessness, lack of healthcare, dysfunctional families, injustices, and racism, my wife and I quickly learned that the gospel must be both shared and shown in this country. Even though our official assignment never required “social ministry,” we have invested a portion of our attention and energies to the cultural mandate. A few efforts have included the use of a holistic tent ministry, assistance to drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, promotion of biblical coun-
counseling, scholarships to lesser privileged ministerial students, and benevolence to homeless and poor families around us. In addition, we discovered that American volunteer teams could be utilized more effectively and contextually when they served through ministries of compassion and aid.

We have never stopped evangelizing or discipling to focus on the cultural mandate ministries. As I reflect upon the people who we have won to Christ and folded into local churches through our personal evangelistic efforts, we surely spent time reading the Scriptures to them and explaining their meaning. On the other hand, we also spent untold hours helping them with their marital relationships, unemployment, personal finances, and emotional problems. Their spiritual lives wove into their daily lives and struggles, and the Gospel appropriately applied to these matters as well.

DIVULGING MY VIEW

After serving thirteen years in a Latin American context and struggling with this topic, I hold that both mandates are essential. I tend to focus naturally on evangelism, probably because of my passion for it and my Baptist heritage. Nevertheless, I realize the necessity of investing in the cultural mandate. In fact, ministries of service and compassion have not been to the exclusion of my evangelistic efforts but instead were complimentary.

The reader then may want to ask, “So you believe that the priority of missions be halved between the two mandates?” I think this question is too simplistic and actually misses the point. Clearly, evangelism is primary to the church’s mission. Nevertheless, the cultural mandate is an obligation for believers as they display God’s glory and show compassion to one another and to a broken world that desperately needs reconciliation to the Lord. Just as the evangelistic mandate finds its centrality in the Gospel, the cultural mandate likewise finds its basis in the Gospel. Therefore, my position resounds with the spirit of Lausanne; that is, the church through the Gospel advances God’s kingdom through evangelism and displays His ways through acts of compassion and social engagement.

Returning to the introduction, I rejoice that this generation of new pastors and missionaries desires to see social transformation take place in the world. The cultural mandate indeed has and will continue to have a significant place in Christian missions. However, we
must remember that there can be “no true lasting social transformation apart from personal conversion through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Köstenberger 2010:67). Hence, I pray that this new generation, my generation, and the one prior to mine strive to transform societies by sharing the Gospel with words and also demonstrating the gospel in deeds.

DIGGING DEEPER - SUGGESTED READING

Go to www.lausanne.org to study and download LM documents from working groups and congresses.

SOURCES


David Bledsoe serves as a missionary in Brazil (IMB, SBC) since appointment in 1998. Residing with his family in Belo Horizonte, he teaches at the Faculdade Batista de Minas Gerais and coordinates a Masters of Theological Studies for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. David holds a M.Div. and D.Min. in Missiology from MABTS and a D.Th. in Missiology from the University of South Africa.
This article will attempt to show the biblical, historical, missiological, theological, and practical aspects of meeting basic human needs as a vehicle and a method for presenting and gaining an audience for the gospel.

**INTRODUCTION**

Currently, there is much debate regarding evangelism versus social ministry in regards to global missions. On one hand, a fear of the “social gospel” has led some to a pure evangelism approach where physical needs of people are seen as a far second in terms of importance when it comes to spiritual needs. On the other hand, young believers and especially the emerging churches have made social ministries a stack pole of their faith, reviving concepts such as social justice and holism in ministry. “Evangelicals committed to the primacy of proclamation in Christian mission have been accused of ‘reductionism’ by their counterparts, whereas the latter have been charged with ‘expansionism’ by the former” (Little, 2008:66) leading to harmful and unprofitable polarization.

This article will attempt to show the biblical, historical, missiological, theological, and practical aspects of meeting basic human needs as a vehicle and a method for presenting and gaining an audience for the gospel. Furthermore, it will try to show that our attempts at both proclamation (evangelism) and demonstration (good works) of the gospel are actually two sides of the same coin. The aim in the end is to see how making Christ known in both word and in deed should be the foundation of our faith and have practical applications in our mission endeavors today. In short, it will advocate a “both/and” approach to the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.
**BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

God’s love and care for the poor and needy is a central theme of His message in the Bible. “For the oppressed will not always be forgotten; the hope of the afflicted will not perish forever” (Ps. 9:18). Time after time, God comes to the aid of those who suffer injustice. “For He will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper. He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor. He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious in His sight” (Ps. 72:12-14).

Furthermore, Isaiah announced that the coming Messiah would be anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, “...to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners...” (Isa. 61:1). Jesus took up that mantle, when at the beginning of His ministry on a Sabbath in a Nazareth synagogue, He claimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. . . . Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled” (Luke 4:18-19; 21).

When asked about the greatest of all the commandments, Jesus used the occasion to link love of neighbor with love of God (Mark 12:28-31). He also demonstrated the power and compassion of God in His actions as well. He touched the eyes of the man born blind (John 9:1ff). He reached out and touched lepers (Mark 1:40ff). Wherever He went, He not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God but demonstrated it as well. “...He went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

Matthew described Jesus as going, “...all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (Matthew 4:23).

However, it should be noted that just as obvious in the Bible is God’s desire to see His gospel go forth into the entire world. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, evangelicals hold fast to the truth that “God’s story” is one of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (DeYoung, Kevin, Gilbert, and Greg, 2011:70). It is a story of all of creation moving towards one purpose, and that is the, “white hot worship of God and His Son among all the peoples
of the earth.” (Piper, 1993:15).

In short, the consummation of our missions participation and effort, whether initiated through spiritual or physical ministries, is found in the vision of John the Revelator when he says: “After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb…” (Rev. 7:9). The International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has captured this concept in their vision statement: “a multitude from every language, people, tribe and nation knowing and worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ” and the subsequent mission statement as, “to make disciples of all peoples in fulfillment of the Great Commission” (IMB website).

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

So where did we lose sight as evangelicals that addressing both physical and spiritual needs do not have to be mutually exclusive in missions, and even our faith? Authors such as Christopher Little describe the current evangelical trends toward social ministry as being on “slippery slopes.” Little attributes it to an “erosion of the biblical mandate for evangelizing the world” that “mirrors what happened to the WCC (World Council of Churches).” Moreover, he states that the “burgeoning movement (is) being propped up by at least two pillars: holistic mission and the kingdom of God motif” (Little, 2008:67).

While the fear of a pure social gospel may be real to some, other missiologists, both old and new, would argue the opposite. “Material and social concern has been part of Christianity from the beginning” (Crawley, 1985:281). As discussed, the Bible is full of compassion ministries. The same has been true in the outreach of Christian missions across the world. William Carey, the pioneer of the modern Protestant mission movement, led the way though a lifelong crusade against some social evils of that day in India. Moreover, he helped with education, along with founding the first ever botanical garden in India.

Though there have been differences in emphasis by various persons due to gifting and calling, and though the main thrust of Christian missions always has been spiritual in looking towards salvation of individuals and the planting of churches, there was no serious polarization of spiritual and social concerns in missions until the twentieth century (Crawley, 1985:282). Crawley attributes the “polariza-
tion” to modern biblical criticism approaches, religious relativism, and a theory of social progress growing out of a theory of evolution. In particular, he cites the social emphasis of Walter Rauschenbusch and others who followed in what became known as the “social gospel.”

This social gospel became a thrust and even “byword” for the World Council of Churches who, in 1968, adopted the theme of “humanization as the goal of mission.” Included in this was the growing rift between the evangelical approach to missions, which stressed the spiritual mission of the church, and the conciliar approach, which stressed the social, economic, and political responsibility. This gave birth to “camps” and extremes on both sides, the most notable being liberation theology.

MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Crawley, “[SBC] Missionaries quite naturally reach out in Christian love to relieve the intense physical and material suffering of those around them” (Crawley, 1985:285). The appointing early on of medical missionaries and building of hospitals around the world have evidenced this. However, it was not until the mid-1970s that the Foreign Mission Board (FMB then, today the IMB) of the SBC began to address this formally in terms of statements and concepts. After a 1974 special study, one of the five strategy principles adopted by the FMB of the SBC was “responding to human needs.” Baker James Cauthen coined the term of the complimentary relationship between witness and ministry by commenting how appropriate it was for the missionary to go to the field with, “a Bible in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other.”

In January 1976, the Board adopted a statement that said, “Evangelism and church development will be maintained as the imperatively central thrust. Compassionate ministries are no less insistent as expressions of obedience and examples of Christian compassion in action.” The formal FMB philosophy statement adopted in 1978 stated, “The task of missions supremely and imperatively is to make disciples, to baptize them and to teach them to observe all that Christ commanded. It includes the entire world – every creature – every generation. The task of missions is also to minister compassionately to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, lack clothing, sick, imprisoned and so forth.”

During the 1970s the FMB began formalizing its approach to human needs ministries. Giving for disaster relief and
ministries by constituents began to become steady during the 70s. This was partly due to increased awareness through media coverage of world calamities such as hurricanes and earthquakes in Central America and droughts in Africa. In late 1974, the FMB developed a formal disaster response plan and encouraged each field grouping to have a disaster response coordinator. Then in the mid-to-late 70s, the FMB formed a Human Needs Department complete with an associate who later became a full Vice President, John Cheyne.

John Cheyne helped move the FMB from a “disaster” mentality of addressing Human Needs to a more proactive, holistic approach. Southern Baptists also instituted an official World Hunger Day. It began in 1978 and continues today as the primary source of funding for holistic SBC work around the world. Today, the IMB has within one of its nine qualifying statements to its vision, the intention of addressing human needs within the context of the church. The IMB Human Needs Ministry Department was renamed the “World Hunger and Relief” department during the 1990s.

In 2007, a new Southern Baptist relief and development organization called Baptist Global Response (BGR) was launched. The Human Needs Ministry office of the IMB was discontinued and the IMB partnered with BGR in order to provide a more effective, efficient, and explicitly Southern Baptist unified global relief and development effort. Today, Southern Baptists have several platforms, ministries and organizations addressing a wide variety of human needs both in relief and development.

Digressing slightly to take into account the wider evangelical world, in 1990, Christian mission strategist Luis Bush began to talk about a vast area of the world stretching from North Africa across the Asian continent through China. As a defined area, it was reported to have the highest levels of socio-economic challenges, while at the same time, having the least access to the church, Christianity and Christian resources. Since the area was between ten and forty degrees latitude north of the equator, it became known as the “10/40 Window” (Bush, 2000).

The 10/40 Window has become in recent years the focus of mission agencies and missionaries. Over 75 percent of the world’s lost live in the Window. Moreover, not only is there a high percentage of the world’s lost, there is a high percentage of the world’s critical human needs as well. Almost 80 percent of the world’s pov-
can flow without encountering significant barriers of understanding and acceptance.” It is sometimes also described as an “ethno-linguistic” group. An “unreached” people group is where “Evangelical Christians comprise less than 2 percent of the total population.” Finally, an “unreached and unengaged” group is a group that has no current church planting strategy consistent with Evangelical faith and practice (IMB Global Research Website).

Best estimates show that about 80 percent of the remaining unreached people groups live in the 10/40 window first described by Bush in 1990. Recent data (Haney, personal communication) show that well over half, and up to two-thirds of the unreached and unengaged groups, live in that same 10/40 window of the world.

There are a number of reasons as to why the remaining unengaged and unreached still exist. One reason is our lack of knowledge of the world and corresponding lack of focus. Recent missiological research and focus is helping to correct this. Another reason is the reluctance of mission organizations to leave the traditional harvest fields. However, possibly the greatest reason is the difficulties associated with the areas of the world where the remaining unreached and unengaged live.
When contemplating how to reach the remaining unreached of the world, it must be acknowledged that huge barriers exist. Physically speaking, the majority of these groups live in areas of the world with an extremely high human development index (HDI), meaning that they are areas of tremendous health concerns (malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, etc.), lack of water resources, little or no infrastructure, and active armed conflict, etc. The list demonstrates that these are not easy areas conducive to sending missionaries, especially those bringing their families. In addition, these are areas with huge spiritual barriers as well. There are government, cultural, religious and other hostile barriers that exist to do everything to keep not only the message of the gospel out but any and all foreign influence as well.

**THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

I will move on to cite particular stories and instances that illustrate the practical aspects of addressing human needs as a missions strategy today. First, I will give a brief word on the theological perspective of holistic missions.

Let me be perfectly clear up front. While I am an ardent advocate of human needs ministries, I am so for the sake of the Kingdom. Our primary focus is to be making Jesus known to a lost and dying race of man. We do this first and foremost through the making of disciples (Matt. 28:19). Our proclamation (evangelism and church planting) and demonstration (physical, human needs ministries) are both means to an end: to see Christ glorified, lifted up and made known to the nations. Any other reasons for our strategies fall short of God’s plan for the nations.

Second, the message that we communicate is the pure and simple “evangel” message or the gospel. It is “God’s power to us who are being saved.” (1 Cor. 1:18b) Our methods of delivery, whether proclamation or demonstration, should not be confused with the message which remains always unchanged: Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on a cross, resurrected by the Father, and risen to heaven.

Third, our ministry task, as given by Christ, is the ministry of reconciliation. “Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambas-
sadors for Christ. . . .” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Thus, our efforts in human needs ministries are more than just helping people to get things that make their lives better. It is much deeper than just throwing money, education, or technology at people’s problems in hopes that they will accept our solutions. It is also not human needs ministries for the sake of humanitarian goals. It is entering into “koinonea,” or “participation” in their lives and communities in order to bring the message of reconciliation. It is modeled on the incarnation of Christ who although being the second member of the Godhead, “...became flesh and took up residence among us” (John 1:14) in order that we could observe and know His glory and give due glory to the Father.

There are four relationships that suffer due to the fall of man. The primary relationship is man to God, and we refer to this as the “vertical” relationship. The other three relationships that suffer are man to man (community), man to creation (stewardship of creation), and man to himself (self-worth/view). We call these the “horizontal” relationships.

Man to God is the first and foremost (primary) relationship that suffered. When Adam sinned through choice, we not only lost paradise, but also the privilege and intimacy to know God and walk with Him in the garden. The good news (gospel) is that God has provided a way for man to return to Him in the birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. What God already has done in His Son Jesus on the cross of Calvary is what we call the “gospel,” or the good news. As followers of Jesus, we are called to make known His gospel among the nations, looking forward to the day that He will bring about a final consummation of His purpose with His second coming.

The other three “horizontal” relationships that suffered with the fall are man to man, man to creation, and man to himself. While these are secondary in nature compared to the primary/vertical relationship to God, they provide windows of opportunity to point a lost and dying world to restoration with God through Jesus. We view the world and physical need as a unique opportunity to be ministered to in a way that enables, facilitates and even undergirds our efforts at proclamation. While our ministry is to be the ministry of reconciliation of the fallen human race with the Creator God, we can start at multiple points with fallen man that can address his relationship with his community, cre-
ation or even himself (ministry in deed) with the goal of opening windows of opportunity for God’s truth to be proclaimed (ministry in word).

In summary, our primary role in reconciliation is to help men see who they are and who they need to be in relationship to the Creator and Sustainer of everything, God the Father. The fact that man is a sinner and in need of a Savior and that God has from the beginning given a way to become whole and restored to Him is the good news we have to share. (However, we also see the value and practicality of addressing the 10/40 Window and the issues of the unreached and unengaged, helping people become reconciled to their communities, creation, and even to themselves.) At the fall, all four categories of man’s relationships suffered. God desires to transform all of these categories into what He originally intended. Using any of these as a starting point, we effectively can point to God and man’s need for His Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior.

**PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Practically, a human needs approach to missions and evangelism can help us do a number of things. For example, this approach can help us in the following ways:

1. Softening of the target. In the parable of the sower, Jesus talked about different types of soil. One was so hard (the pathway) that the seed could not penetrate, so it was trampled upon and the birds of the air snatched it up. Human needs ministries help to break up the hard soil through acts of kindness and compassion so as to allow the seed of gospel to take root.

2. Gaining access. In many countries/communities with limited access to the gospel, our efforts at relief and development give us a legitimate and welcomed entry into the community.

3. Providing a viable platform. Not only do we gain a welcomed entry, but also a tangible reason for being there.

4. Gaining long-term presence. In many cases due to the entry point of human needs, we not only gain entry and a viable platform, but a means of having a long-term presence as well due to the cumulative effects of softening and ministry based relationships.

5. Being a solid expression of true Christian love and concern.
6. Correcting pre-conceived ideas about Christians. In most cases, there are pre-conceived negative ideas about who Christians are and what we do. Human needs ministries provide a living way to correct some of these.

7. Building relationships in an often hostile environment.

**POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF HUMAN NEEDS MINISTRIES**

There are, however, a number of potential negatives in utilizing human needs strategies such as:

1. Creating dependency in the target group. Overuse or improper use and approaches to development (especially in a missions setting) can cause more problems than it solves.

2. Shifting the focus from the “main thing” to the project/program at hand. Projects for relief and development require time, skills, and the efforts of those running them. There is the fear in mission circles that these efforts will take a person away from the “main thing” which is proclamation.

3. Conflicting ethical issues such as making “rice” Christians. “Rice Christian” is a term used to describe a person who becomes a Christian not for faith’s sake but for socio-economic or politically perceived benefits (real or unreal). “Hand out” programs can lead to this, but good development principles and discernment can help avoid this problem.

4. Causing a high profile in a non-secure area (e.g., non-government organizations, NGOs, are notoriously suspected as “fronts”). There is a growing concern in many governments of the world regarding the proliferation of NGOs. In some cases, they are seen as basically fund-raising machines exploitative of the very people that they claim to help. In other cases, they are seen as fronts for religious or imperialistic motives. There is a growing wariness worldwide of NGOs and private “volunteer” organizations.

5. Consuming too much time. The main concern with this one is discussed in number two above.

6. Needing people with specialized skills. Relief and development programs do require people with specialized talents and skills. Often they are hard to find in a typical church leadership/mission organization.
The one clear thing that human needs ministries cannot do for us on their own is to evangelize, disciple, and start churches. While relief and development projects and programs allow access and are a tangible expression of God’s love, we must acknowledge that, “faith comes by what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Our demonstration of God’s love does validate our proclamation of the truth. Conversely, our proclamation clarifies that demonstration. Our human needs ministries must be proactively engaging in verbal sharing of the good news and disciple making or they are not truly holistic.

CASE STORY 1 — A HEALTH CARE CLINIC IN RURAL NORTH AFRICA

I recently visited a health care clinic in a very hard-to-access area of North Africa. The national government is very restrictive of the work of foreign organizations in this region. The local culture is militant and extremely resistant to those from outside their faith. Attempting traditional approaches to missions in these areas would at best result in an invitation to leave the country. In most cases, traditional approaches would never get to the intended targets.

Utilizing a health care strategy has opened doors and windows of opportunity for close and constant contact with a number of unreached people groups. Working through national and local permission channels, we have been able to help establish a basic health-care facility in the midst of an unreached area that helps people physically (in the area of better health) and spiritually (offering a channel for the gospel to go forth).

Beneficiaries to the clinic are identified and sent to the clinic by the local government. Since all of the people come from the local population and the clinic is located in the heart of an unreached area, the majority of people who come are unreached. People come with a recommendation and with a physical need. They are “triaged” for both physical and spiritual needs. Of those who come 100% receive some type of help physically from a health care perspective. About 10 percent respond to the spiritual probing that goes on during the triage/treatment time and come to faith as well. In an area of the world where there is no church and few or no believers, a well-designed health care strategy such as this one can help people physically, in the
name of Christ, and open up windows for the gospel to be proclaimed.

CASE STORY 2— A WATERSHED PROJECT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In a restricted access area of Southeast Asia, a church oriented Non-Government Organization (NGO) was approached by a major government donor to help in the protection of a watershed area in a predominately Muslim area. The NGO pointed out that they were a Christian organization and perhaps the donor would rather have a local Muslim-NGO to do the work. However, both the donor and the local Muslim government officials insisted that this particular organization do the work because they were a “good” Christian development organization that “worked according to the Christian principles of honesty and integrity.”

They accepted the four-year, $215,000 project and were able to help implement almost 3,000 hectares of upland conservation cropping systems in a 30,000 hectare watershed area. They developed numerous farmer-led conservation groups as well as implemented conservation clubs in every school in the upper watershed area. They helped establish over eighty seedling nurseries for forestry and fruit tree crops. They did this with a highly-trained and professional team of Filipino extension workers who were also Kingdom people with a heart for seeing individuals and communities come to know the Lord along with churches formed.

The results for the Filipino church were impressive. In four years, over twenty-five churches were planted. Two previously unreached people groups were engaged. One local church leader training program was established and over 200 local leaders were trained in holistic ministries. All of this was done through a human needs strategy and “lay” leaders in an area with very limited access to the gospel.

CONCLUSION

While this author concedes that good works apart from the proclamation of the gospel is no more than humanitarian work, proclaiming the gospel without love or compassion for the object of that proclamation is equally deficient. We have not been called to an “either/or” gospel but rather a “both/and,” whereby we make Christ known to a lost and dying world by our words and our deeds. True, the gospel must be proclaimed, heard and affected in the heart of a person for that person to be truly regenerated in nature.
However, the addressing of physical needs in the form of human needs ministries has proved to be biblically, theologically, and missiologically sound. Moreover, human needs ministries should never be taken as a substitute for the evangelism and church-planting mandate. Rather, it should be viewed as a key component and vehicle to those mandates. In a time where it is becoming increasingly difficult to access the last of the lost world, our primary strategy should be a ministry focus on the least of these.

Sources


Haney, Jim. Personal communication. Global Research Department, International Mission Board, SBC, Richmond, VA.


The storm knocked down huts, dead animals littered the area, jobs ended because of destroyed ships, and the desperate needed food and water. What were we to do as disciples of Jesus?

Village after village in this area suffered as a result of a huge swell of seawater brought ashore by Cyclone Nargis. As we drove along the pothole-filled dirt road, people lined up to see who we were. The government roadblock did not present an obstacle to us, because they knew we were there to help those affected by the storm. Many of the government military roadblocks meant that you would have to surrender a percentage of your goods to them in order to get rites of passage. We traveled empty-handed. Therefore, passage was not an issue. After about four hours on the bumpy road, we arrived at a stench-filled village. The storm knocked down huts, dead animals littered the area, jobs ended because of destroyed ships, and the desperate needed food and water. What were we to do as disciples of Jesus?

More needs existed than we could possibly meet. We asked the community leaders to tell us what they needed. They replied that they needed food and work. They said that they needed a road, because vehicles could not drive from the main road to their village. A national partner suggested that we build a road in the village using village labor and pay them at the end of each day with food.

The project started very quickly. After a short trip into a local town, we purchased shovels, hoes, rakes, and sledgehammers. The work was hard. Each day, shortly after daybreak, laborers would show up, grab a tool, and begin working on the road. We began by digging a ditch, to outline the road, then crews excavated a portion of the middle of the road. The
work would progress each day. John, the foreman of the project, would pay each of the laborers with food. After everyone was paid, they would go home to eat and then return for a time of discussion.

John, a missionary, wanted to see this village reached for Jesus. Each evening at the discussion time, he would answer questions that villagers posed. Most wanted to know why he wanted to help them. John would tell them that Jesus sent him to help them. Naturally, the follow up questions would be about Christianity. Over a few weeks, John shared the Gospel many times during those evening discussions. The strategy was simple.

A SIMPLE STRATEGY

Strategically the team made the decision to focus upon villages according to the following set of criteria:

1. The cyclone must have impacted the village.
2. No churches must exist in the village.
3. No other Christian group must be targeting the village.
4. The village must need some type of community project.
5. The Gospel must be unknown to the village.

The strategy, chosen after prayer and fasting, proved to be one that God used. A total of seventeen villages were found to fit the above criteria. Different communities needed different projects. Communities built roads, bridges, bamboo meeting homes, and wells. Of the seventeen villages entered, a total of 322 non-believers became Christians and sixteen new village churches started. The team shared the Gospel, and many who heard believed. As soon as possible, the team baptized the new believers, taught the ordinances of the church, practiced the Lord’s Supper, and expected them to tithe. Baptisms took place in ponds, lakes, swimming pools, water cistern tanks, and rivers. Each village church took the name of the village as a part of its name. A U.S. based church could have done this type of church planting if they had committed to the task.

A TREND TO NOTICE

Churches are looking for ways to get involved in the type of church planting that includes being the hands and feet of Jesus. This emerging trend in the church, if not directed, will head into waters dominated by humanitarian interests and feel-good motives. A current trend in Southern Baptist churches involves a younger generation
who desires to participate in relief and development ministries and missions. Churches that do not recognize this “hands-on” movement will find their younger congregants flocking to churches that provide opportunities for them to serve, because serve they will, either with or without their pastor and the church.

Ralph Winter, in a 2010 article, mentions that traditional church-planting missions from 2004-2009 experienced a growth of 2.7 percent (Winter, 2009, 8). The same article states that relief and development missions, which already exceeded traditional church planting, grew 75 percent. Global issues of poverty, orphans, hunger, and disasters have taken center stage in the minds of many who are below the age of forty. The buzzword bantered about to represent these global issues is social justice. Yet, probing deeper into the impetus undergirding this trend, one sees that the less-than-forty generation wants to engage these issues at a Kingdom level. They do not desire to become humanitarians or to engage in a new monasticism. Instead, they desire both to share the truth and to meet needs. This is sometimes described as Word and Deed ministry. Many with differing perspectives do not appreciate Word and Deed ministry.

THE PREACH ONLY DOCTRINE

I often hear the statement, “We must continue to focus upon the main thing.” The assertion that the main thing in missions, or Christianity, is that we must win the lost is not disputable. However, the underlying implication of the main thing assertion is that we must reach the lost at all costs, even to the extent that we ignore the pressing physical needs that may surround those without Christ. A review of the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament, demonstrates that God has a concern for the lost, and in His incarnate state demonstrated, more frequently than not, that sharing truth should accompany meeting physical needs. Taking care of physical needs is often termed the Social Gospel.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT

The American Social Gospel Movement originated among liberal professors and protestant pastors. American social gospelers drew from British leaders F. D. Maurice, C. Kingsley, and H. S. Holland. They shaped the Social Gospel Movement’s theology and application (Cross
and Livingstone, 2005, 1522). The heart of the movement stated that the saving work of Christ included redemption from corporate structures, including many social and political issues. This belief became reinforced through both revivalism as well as some of the great awakenings that involved societal changes as a result of large-scale regenerations. Additional reinforcement happened when denominations and seminar-ies reshaped their curricula to address social concerns. As the Social Gospel agenda developed, concern surfaced that the church’s true purpose would be diluted. Most of this concern originated with conservatives who felt that the church was becoming unconcerned with lost humanity. However, the Social Gospel Movement felt that Christianity could not be insensitive to the pains of the present (Shelley, 1995, 412-15).

The Social Gospel Movement frightened conservatives. This fear made the application of the term Social Gospel into one associated with a lack of evangelism, unconcern for the lost, and ineffective missions. It was an easy term to fling about in order to defend against an often-misunderstood application of practical Christianity. As a result, many conservatives continue to think that meeting physical needs of the poor through agricultural missions, medical work, or hunger relief, as a few examples, fit into the Social Gospel category. This is most egregious to God and most unfortunate for the Church. It behooves us to look at what the Scriptures teach in this regard and not simply throw relief and development into such a negative light.

GOD’S CONCERN FOR PHYSICAL NEEDS

From the beginning of the biblical account, we see God’s concern for mankind demonstrated in physical ways. God designed the Garden of Eden to take care of man’s need for food. Yet even though God created the Garden, mankind had the responsibility to care and nurture it (community development). After the fall, we see God’s concern for Adam and Eve when He designed and provided clothing for them. Similarly, God provided instructions for Noah to provide for the future of His creation by building an ark and stocking it with animals to replenish creation. The communities developed along many occupational lines (Word in Life Study Bible). Complimentary to the functional development of the community, God showed His concern for the less fortunate who were a part of His community through
various means in the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT SUPPORT

Let’s consider the poor as an example. God’s expectations toward the poor are regularly seen in the Old Testament. The poor were not to be neglected, but cared for by His people. They possessed rights, were to be helped generously, and were not to be abused (Manser, 1999). Special rules were set in motion by God to ensure that the poor in the community were cared for systematically. The patriarchs regularly modeled God’s concern for the underclass and their wealth by addressing the needy (Blomberg, 1999, 23).

Mosaic legislation on behalf of the poor dictated the actions of God’s people toward them in many areas. The poor had the right to glean the corners of the fields, and the owners of the field were to leave those areas unharvested for that particular purpose. Because of this legislation, Ruth met her kinsman redeemer. In sabbatical years, shares of produce were given to the poor. If a poor person had to give up their property and were in poverty, the law allowed them to recover their property in the year of jubilee. Employers were to pay the poor at the end of each day, ensure that they were clothed, and provide for their care and fair financial treatment (Easton, 1996). The poor were often comprised of widows, orphans, and other victims of various scenarios. God’s concern for them continues into the New Testament as well.

NEW TESTAMENT SUPPORT

A pause may be warranted at this point, however. Opponents of Word and Deed missions often point out that the physical care of the less fortunate is concentrated primarily in the Old Testament. Granted, many of the legislative issues surrounding the poor and needy are addressed there. Nevertheless, Old Testament directives concerning the care of the destitute are not abolished by New Testament teaching. To refer to the Old Testament directives as outdated because they are in the Old Testament places a person in a very precarious position concerning the trustworthiness of the Bible. This line of reasoning attempts to magnify the preach-only doctrine at the expense of the essential nature of meeting physical needs. The idea that proclamation alone in an uncaring evangelistic environment, one that ignores prevalent surrounding needs, will win the world to Christ appears absurd to many who have spent years
working cross-culturally in developing countries. The illogical and unbiblical attempt to ignore needs is often accompanied by a legalistic belief in workbook evangelism and church planting. In the New Testament, we see examples of very effective evangelism. In many cases, meeting needs either preceded or followed evangelism. The New Testament repeatedly demonstrates the integral part of deeds to both reach the lost and minister to the saved.

**THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

One of the first issues to arise in the New Testament concerned the unmet needs of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1). The church was instructed to care for the truly widowed (1 Tim. 5:16), and undefiled religion lent itself to the care of widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27). The new church held all things in common to meet needs as they appeared. These needs were met while the masses came to Christ.

Paul, when telling his followers that he did not burden them with his needs, reminded them that they should work to meet the needs of the weak (Acts 20:35). Often this and other passages are spiritualized to mean the spiritually weak. However, it is clear in this context that Paul speaks of the physically weak. This is reinforced when he states that Jesus Himself instructed them in this way. First, we see Paul's leadership in this area. Next, we see his passion in this area.

Paul, in Galatians 2:10, states that he was eager to meet the needs of the suffering saints. Paul's concern for the needs that people had was not a passing thought or a secondary consideration in his work. It was a continual part of Paul's ministry. The previous verses indicate that the Jerusalem Council leaders, James, Peter, and John, endorsed and instructed Paul to meet the needs of the less fortunate. Other disciples supported Paul in this work as well, and they gave significantly to the work (Acts 11:29). Paul's passion also accompanied his leadership instruction to others.

Paul's departing words to Titus imperatively state that Titus' congregants are to learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs to avoid an unfruitful life (Titus 3:14). When writing to the church at Rome, he describes the gifts in Romans 12:13 and 12:20-21. Paul specifically speaks of meeting the needs of others and using such deeds to reverse evil. Again in the same epistle, Paul speaks of Macedonia and Achaia making contributions to the needs of the poor among
the saints in Jerusalem, and he very clearly connects spiritual obligations to physical obligations (Rom.15:27-28). Verse 28 indicates the extent to which Paul approved this work when he says he puts his seal on their fruit. Likewise, Paul gave a plan to the Corinthians in order to collect funds for the needy (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

Paul was not the only New Testament leader who felt that the church should address the needs that surrounded them. Peter, James, and John also felt, as Paul did, that needs should be attended. There also exists a sort of general conversation in the New Testament concerning the meeting of needs. Let’s look first at Peter’s words.

In 1 Peter 2:12, Peter emphasizes the importance of believers overcoming slanderous opinions about them by doing good deeds. These deeds, according to Peter, would counter the perceptions the Gentiles had about believers. Evidently the Gentiles thought that believers were evildoers. Peter even goes so far as to say that because of these good deeds, some of the Gentiles would be won to Christ and glorify God on the judgment day. Peter puts this into practice in a very practical way in Acts 3, where upon walking toward the Temple, accompanied by John, he sees a lame man and heals him. It is a clear display of both Word and Deed evangelism. He shares about Jesus and heals the man. One cannot say that Peter meant to heal the man and not address the spiritual need the man had. Likewise, one cannot say that Peter only meant for the man to hear about Jesus and not address the physical issue at hand. Word and deed went hand in hand.

James, the pastor of the Jerusalem church, leader of the Jerusalem Council, and apostolic trailblazer, addresses the issue of living faith proven through deeds. In James 2:14, the discourse begins with a rhetorical question concerning the salvific quality of faith. As an example, James chose the example of a person who is in need of clothing and food. He describes a situation where a bystander tells the needy person to go in peace, be warmed and fed, but does nothing to provide clothing or food. Very poignantly, James says that a person who says words but provides no assistance does not possess a living faith. Faith without works, in James eyes, is useless.

John, as the author of the Gospel and three epistles, also has much to say about meeting the needs around us. Similar to James, John makes the issue of meeting needs an issue that separates the saved from the lost. Christ laid down His life for
us according to John 3:16-18. He spoke of the necessity of our doing the same for others. Verse 17 immediately launches into a rhetorical question that states that God’s love cannot abide in a person who sees the need and does not surrender personal goods to meet the need. John then encourages his readers to understand that we should not love with words, but with deeds and truth.

However, picking out specific writers does not necessarily demonstrate the general cultural conversation that existed in Jesus’ day. For example, the Samaritan’s story of Luke 10 finds Jesus addressing multiple issues, using the scenario where a man is robbed and left on the side of the road for dead. Two leading religious figures of the day, a Levite and a Priest, ignore the wounded man’s needs and continue along the way unabated by the urgent need. Jesus introduces another character to the scene, a person who was despised by both the Levite and the Priest. Although hated by the Jews, the Samaritan stops, helps the man by dressing his wounds, and then facilitates the care of the man at an inn, even promising repayment to the innkeeper if the man requires more. The Priest and the Levite had components of the truth, but lacked compassion. The Samaritan, normally condemned because of his heritage, becomes the shining example. The Priest and the Levite, normally held up as examples of propriety, are condemned for lack of compassion.

Similarly, in Matthew 25, Jesus separates the sheep and goats at the judgment seat according to the things they did in ministry for the less fortunate. He did not separate them in a salvific sense according to their good works. He, like James and John, declared that a saved person’s testimony would include such works. The sheep in this chapter did not even remember doing the things Jesus lists. Helping others, in this writer’s opinion, was a natural outflow of the redemptive work of Christ in the lives of the sheep. I often hear in reply to a discussion of this passage, “Do you think that Jesus wants us to substitute the message of salvation with meeting needs?” My constant reply is that Jesus did not do that. He did not substitute the message of salvation by meeting physical needs. Instead, He demonstrated His concern for the souls of people by meeting their needs. He steadily shared truth while also meeting needs.

**THE FALSE DICHOTOMY**

The question often posed is, “Is it appropriate to give some-
one a bowl of rice and share the Gospel with them at the same time?” The common thinking today is that we should separate word and deed. This is a false dichotomy. If you look at the ministry of Jesus, more often than not, He combined meeting a need with sharing truth. He was known for His words and deeds (Luke 24:19). While imprisoned, John the Baptist sent word to Jesus to try to find out if He truly was the Messiah. You will remember that John the Baptist had baptized Jesus. He knew Jesus. However, he was in prison and wanted to make sure that the person he had been hearing about was the Messiah. He sent his disciples to Jesus, and they questioned Him. “Are you the one?”, they asked. Jesus sent word back to John the Baptist. He describes His ministry, and directed them to go and tell John the Baptist of what they both saw and heard. Jesus described His ministry in terms of word and deed. This self-description challenges the false dichotomy of those opposed to Word and Deed missions and ministry.

**THE GOSPELS**

A review of the Gospels demonstrates quite the opposite of the preach only doctrine. Consider three scenarios. First, observe the times in the Gospels when a physical need is met and no truth is presented. Second, record the times in the Gospels when truth in any form is presented without some type of need being addressed. Third, count the number of times when sharing the truth is combined with meeting a need. Here are the results:

A need met without the truth presented = 5 times

Truth shared without a need met = 58 times

A combination of truth shared and needs met = 99 times

In practical terms, this means that Jesus or His disciples used a prevailing need to share some type of truth. It also shows that most people who came to Jesus did not necessarily come to Him exclusively to hear the truth. We seldom see purely truth seekers in the Gospels. On the other hand, repeatedly people sought Jesus for a need, but repeatedly had truth shared with them as an accompanying consequence. This means that Jesus met needs and shared truth without considering the simultaneous act an ethical breach, to which many in the more humanitarian Christian community might object. It also signifies that Jesus was not concerned
about making *rice Christians*, as many in the more conservative Christian community might rationalize. Jesus knew the hearts of all men and did not deny meeting needs because of their hearts. He did not substitute His message with humanitarian acts either, but instead used the needs as a venue for sharing. He knew all of the possible outcomes of His actions. He did not intentionally create false believers, but neither did He shy away from meeting needs and sharing the truth because of that possibility.

**PRAXIS**

Current practice on the mission field makes the term *Social Gospel* a somewhat irrelevant term. Its use is regularly relegated to those who function in a purely humanistic strategy, thinking that acts that meet needs are the gospel, and good deeds alone constitute propositional truth. The term often deployed is *human needs strategy* or *relief and development strategy* (*R&D*). Even the term *human needs strategy* is beginning to fall to the wayside because of its association with humanitarianism. Nevertheless, *R&D* has proven to be an effective venue for developing relationships, meeting needs, and sharing the Gospel.

As a strategy, *R&D* is often used for a variety of reasons. One basic reason, common to most *R&D* work, is the community’s perceived need. A community may need better access to potable water. Water has become a critical issue in many parts of the world. A good water development strategy accomplishes much. It gives access to the community due to the need for potable water. This means access to all community segments. Relationships should be cultivated as the work to develop the water resources of the area matures.

**RULE-OF-THUMB**

A good rule-of-thumb for establishing an effective kingdom *R&D* strategy or project is the A-B-C-D-E guide. Each point can be posed as a question.

A  Does the project give you access?

B  Does the project give you behind the door personal time with people?

C  Does the project exhibit care or compassion?

D  Does the project develop the capacity of the community?

E  Does the project lead to evangelistic sharing?

While the A-B-C-D-E guide is useful for overseas mission
strategy, western churches would do well to apply a similar intentional strategy in attempting to reach people through domestic community projects. The following example demonstrates the application of the A-B-C-D-E scenario.

A number of years ago it became evident that naturally occurring arsenic created chronic health issues for a large swath of an Asian country. The resulting condition, arsenicosis, caused a number of problems. They ranged from discoloration of skin pigment to peripheral neuropathy in the hands and feet. Wanting to reach these communities, believers spread knowledge and awareness of the issue and offered household solutions. Education campaigns and clay water pot filters offered A-B-C-D-E opportunities to thousands of homes. It reduced community exposure to contaminated water, and thus reduced water-related illnesses. However, it also gave believers the opportunity to regularly demonstrate through both word and deed the love of God and His redemptive plan.

CONCLUSION

Relief and Development strategy has suffered stigma through association with past Social Gospel practice and theology. In practice, today’s R&D application is often far removed from past Social Gospel methods that hid the Gospel and hoped for a gradual social conversion. In reality, R&D provides numerous inroads into both reachable and unreachable ethnic groups. If the evangelist and church planter realize that almost two-thirds of unreached groups are in need of some form of development and nearly one-half experience cyclical disasters, the value of R&D strategy becomes apparent. The preach-only method loses effectiveness in situations where physical needs prevail and are ignored. It is not what Jesus did. Word and Deed missions demonstrate a sincere gospel and not an uncaring message. The Kingdom would be much expanded if we focused not upon WWJD but WDJD (What did Jesus do?).
Pat Meloncon received a PhD from MABTS in 1997. He has worked in 26 countries with the International Mission Board doing relief and development teaching, training, and church planting. He is currently serving as the Managing Director for Disaster Response and Training for Baptist Global Response. His focus is training churches, associations, university groups, and other SBC entities to do disaster response overseas.
Mission Arlington doesn’t fit into the customary language of church, nor does it fit into the typical category of social work. God has done something amazing here.

Mission Arlington is more a movement than a strategy, more a spirit than a structure, more like a family than an organization. It’s not about religion, and it is as much about God as it is about people. For these reasons, and so many more, Mission Arlington doesn’t fit into the customary language of church, nor does it fit into the typical category of social work. God has done something amazing here, and He has done it in His own time and in His own way.

Mission Arlington belongs to God. This isn’t our story, but His. He had plans in place for this ministry and for all who work here long before the outreach began. He started this mission, sustains us moment by moment, and He holds our future in His hands. As we talk about who we are it is with sincere humility, a sense of dependency and a commitment to the leadership of His Spirit within us.

We are grateful to each and every one who has walked this journey with us. Together we will continue to serve Him one day at a time.

INTRODUCTION

Something extraordinary is happening in Arlington, Texas. For twenty-five years, Christians here have been coloring outside the lines of traditional church work to “take church to the people—one life at a time.” Without professional seminary degrees and armed primarily with the truth of John 3:16, these lay men and women are making a difference in their own city, sharing the good news of Jesus.
Christ wherever they go (Matt 28:19).

These followers of Jesus are hard at work. They gather people for Bible studies in apartment club houses, mobile home parks, and multiple neighborhoods around the city. They go wherever anyone is open to receiving a message about God’s love. People are invited to study the Bible right where they live, and just as they are. These blue jeans and tennis shoes, (come as you are) Bible studies happen each week in 316 locations across Arlington and the surrounding community. On Easter Sunday morning, 2011, more than 6,000 people worshiped the Lord in these congregations.

For the purposes of this essay, this moving story of God’s love will be covered in two parts. First, a brief historical overview will be given. Then, personal testimonies from the lives of real people.

**PART 1: LOOKING BACK: KEY PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE WAY**

An Important Key

In the early days, as people were taking the message of God’s love into the city, they discovered that pain in people’s lives often prevented them from receiving the good news. Ordinary people were struggling with health crises, the loss of employment, or a variety of other difficult circumstances which made it challenging for them to have energy for anything other than trying to survive.

The Mission Arlington family knew that they couldn’t simply offer people Jesus, then exhort them to “be warm and be filled,” hoping that they might somehow “make it.” On the other hand, it was important to care for people “just as they were,” right where they were in order to earn the requisite trust needed to gain access into people’s lives. Authentic, consistent ministry over time, therefore, became a key that opened the door to genuine relationships which allowed the gospel a hearing.

Virginia Manaani, one of the early converts in Mission Arlington’s work shared her thoughts:

I didn’t trust you. I had already been hurt by a lot of people, and I knew Christians always came out of their box at special times of the year – like Thanksgiving and Christmas. I had to know if you were real. The people of Mission Arlington proved it to me time and time again, because they helped
me with my needs, and they kept coming back, even when it wasn’t easy for them, and when I wasn’t always easy to love.

Virginia eventually grew in her faith to the point that she began reaching the people in her own apartment community. For many years after that, Virginia led a Mission Arlington Bible study herself.

**Staying Purposefully Grounded**

The ministries of Mission Arlington have grown numerically to the point that more than 1,000 people (250 families) come through their front doors for help six days each week. The various types of ministries provided, all of them free of charge, also have proliferated. Mission Arlington offers a multitude of services every day—from crisis intervention (food, clothes, furniture, financial assistance), to transportation, counseling, medical and dental clinics, after school programs, and so much more. (see [www.missionarlington.org/services](http://www.missionarlington.org/services) for a full listing).

As important as these ministries are in and of themselves, those who volunteer and work at Mission Arlington remember that their work is not primarily about meeting physical, social, and emotional needs, but about sharing the gospel. The physical provisions which the Lord faithfully supplies to Mission Arlington are simply tools which help us communicate the very best gift we have to offer—a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ. After all, only the “living water” to which Jesus refers in John chapter 4 ultimately satisfies the soul. For this reason, the Mission Arlington team intentionally steers each ministry and every activity to the crucial intersection between meeting physical and spiritual needs.

One way to illustrate this principle would be with Mission Arlington’s Christmas Store. The Christmas Store began more than twenty-three years ago with a simple realization. People were coming into Mission Arlington’s front room, about to be evicted, or to have their electricity cut off, because they were being forced to make a choice between getting Christmas gifts for their children and paying their bills. Their choice every single time was to get Christmas gifts for their children. The (free) Christmas store gave these hard working moms and dads a chance to do both.

**The Store and the Story**

This year through Mission Arlington’s 13 Day Christmas
Store, the Lord provided Christmas gifts to nearly nine thousand families (8,976). This means that more than 35,673 children would have something under the tree at Christmas time. Yet, as important as this is, the toys for children weren’t the exclusive purpose of the Christmas store. In fact, the Christmas story was just as important as the store itself. Mission Arlington volunteers shared (Luke 2) in six different languages this year. Because of this, 458 adults accepted Christ as their Savior. Another 1,166 rededicated their lives to the Lord. One lady who returned to the store this year put it this way: “I appreciate and value the gifts my children receive through your Christmas Store, but the real reason I came back this year is that I wanted to hear that story one more time.” The truth is, in Arlington, TX, many still haven’t heard the good news about a Savior who was born at Christmas time. The store gives us the chance again and again to tell the old, old story.

God’s Gas Station: One More to Fill Up:

It all began for me August 24, 1936, here in Arlington. Arlington has always been a very special place. At that time it was a small town, with small businesses. It was a hometown setting whose people had big hearts.

Bonnie and Erman Lester, my parents, operated a Gulf Service Station on Pecan and Abram Streets in downtown Arlington for forty years. They served this community well. Erman and Bonnie passed away a few years ago now.

As a kid I would wait for daddy to come home at night. He would always be running late and the hour would be close to 9 p.m. each evening. I remember asking, “Why is it always so...
late when you get home?” His response was, “Honey, there is always one more car to fill up.” As he would try to close up the station to come home, someone would call and say, “I have a flat,” or “I need a battery,” or there would be some other need in a person’s life. He never asked if they could pay. He always went with no questions asked.

At Erman’s funeral, the First Baptist Church of Arlington, TX, was packed with citizens from the community who had their tires aired up after the station was closed, and Dad stayed to help, or he went out with a gas can because a car had run out of gas, or a battery when a car would not start. There were so many times I went with him on what he called “service calls” in this small red pickup.

The church was full of people who recognized the friend he was to them. He had hired many of their children to work after school just to help keep a young person out of trouble. (I don’t think I ever got paid.) His grandson, Jim Burgin, gave tribute at his funeral to a very special granddad who represented truth and love and hard work. He said, “Erman Lester was respected by all. Not one unkind word did he ever speak.”

As the six former mayors of this city walked out of the church as pallbearers, I thought, what a testimony to a man who did make a difference. I never saw Erman in a suit (he was always in a Gulf uniform), he didn’t attend church very often, he never went to the golf course, and on rare occasions he took his family on a vacation. Most of his life was devoted to giving away his life so others would be OK. We, who knew him, stand to applaud the heritage he left and the love he had for us all.

Years later, Mission Arlington came to be a kind of spiritual gas station for the soul, a place where each and every life was important. Mission Arlington is just one block from that old gas station. Tillie, the young girl who grew up pumping gas in her dad’s Gulf station, has been leading Mission Arlington now for twenty-five years. In fact, Mission Arlington is just one block from Tillie’s childhood home. Tillie reminds
people on occasion (with a smile) that she never did really get very far from home.

A Missionary Heritage: Korea and Arlington

In 1956, Tillie married Bob Burgin. Bob was subsequently drafted into the military and served his country in South Korea during the war. Tillie followed Bob there, and they both fell in love with the Korean people. In 1966, the Burgins went back to Korea, this time with two young boys, but as missionaries appointed by the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention. During the appointment process, Tillie filled out a questionnaire supplied by the mission agency seeking preferences about fields of service. The Burgins wrote in “Korea” or “Arlington.” Later, thinking that there had been a misunderstanding, Dr. Baker James Cauthen, then the Director of the Foreign Mission Board, called Tillie at home. He attempted to help her understand the purpose of the questionnaire. “If Korea were to close to missionary service,” he suggested, “in what other country would you and Bob wish to serve?” Tillie remembers the calm, but confident presence of the Lord when she responded to Dr. Cauthen. She knew then, way back in the early 1960s, that their fields of service were to be Korea or Arlington, nothing else. When the Burgins were commissioned later that year, Dr. Cauthen gave them a personal challenge. “Tillie and Bob, remember, your commitment is to Korea for a lifetime.” Tillie’s immediate response, “No sir, our commitment is to the Lord Jesus Christ for a lifetime.”

After a decade of service in South Korea, the Burgins returned to Arlington in 1978. Bob and Tillie served as educators in the Arlington Independent School District, but they continued to speak about their missionary service every chance they got. Tillie could never get away from a persistent sense of God’s leading. The Lord’s conversation with her always began with a question: “If you can do missions in Korea, why can’t you be a missionary here in Arlington?” The answer to that question would ultimately lead to the birth of Mission Arlington.

The Priority of Prayer

From 1978 to 1986, a period of seven years, Tillie, Bob, and their closest friends prayed. They couldn’t describe what they were feeling exactly, nor did they understand what God wanted to do with them in
their own city. For four months, prayers were offered in homes across the city each week. In August of 1986, First Baptist Church in Arlington, in partnership with the Home Mission Board (now NAMB) and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, hired Tillie to be their first Minister of Missions. Mission Arlington was birthed in prayer, and continues that wonderful heritage even through today. You don’t have to be around Mission Arlington long before you will hear Tillie remind everyone that “Mission Arlington runs on the prayers of His people.” Prayer forms the foundation for everything the Mission does. In 1990, Mission Metroplex, Inc. was formed. Today, every church in Arlington, and many from around the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex and across the country support Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex in some form or fashion.

PART II: PERSONAL TESTIMONIES FROM THE LIVES OF REAL PEOPLE

Each week a multitude of people are being reached by the Lord through the ministry of Mission Arlington, but it has never been about numbers. Tillie reminds her team regularly that “every life is important,” and that she “has never met a number walking through the front door.” For Tillie, and the entire Mission Arlington family, the most important word in John 3:16 is “whosoever.” The Mission Arlington team will never turn away from any life in need, because they know that God would never “throw anyone away.”

In the paragraphs that follow are stories of real people touched in and through the ministry of Mission Arlington. Kelly and Tina were people who were reached through the ministry. Faith’s story is from one who came to the mission as a volunteer, and the last testimony comes from a youth minister who brought many youth mission teams to Mission Arlington over a period of years.

Touched by the Ministry: Kelly’s Journey

A series of poor choices and difficult events took Kelly down a long and rocky road. Though she had a supportive family, and a good start in life, Kelly fell into the wrong crowd, and her life changed drastically.

Kelly’s drug use started slowly enough, but the habit grew, and ultimately took over her life. The people she thought were her friends disappeared. Her job went away too. She found herself in a difficult place, without a job, a place to stay, or a friend she could lean on. She
ended up sleeping alone in her car and crying out to God for help.

Mission Arlington had already been helping Kelly with her transportation needs, so it was natural to share Christ with her receptive spirit. This happened years ago, and Kelly’s poor choices and missteps are in her distant past. Kelly loves the Lord, and is currently leading the youth ministry in one of Mission Arlington’s congregations. Her smile is contagious, and she is a blessing to everyone who comes across her path.

Touched by the Ministry: Tina’s Testimony

I came to Mission Arlington, and in March of 2006 I met some wonderful people there. My children attended the after school program led by Mission Arlington at the apartment complex where we lived. They would come home each time having learned a different Bible verse.

Then one day a lady knocked at my door inviting me to attend a Sunday morning Mission Arlington led Bible study. I didn’t know it at the time, but everything was about to change. I started attending the Bible study held each week in the clubhouse of our apartment community. I noticed that everyone there was like family. I went home that evening and began to ask God what I was supposed to do.

I loved it. I began to grow as a Christian, and other people began to notice that something was different. Now, I am actually getting to teach youth at this very same Bible study. I am so excited that God is using me.

I know that I haven’t arrived yet. The Lord and I still have a lot of work to do together. Yet, I am well on my way. I love my children. I love teaching the Bible to eager ears, and I love Mission Arlington. God has used them to bless my life. Now I am so glad that, together with them, God is using me to bless others.

Faith: A Volunteer Who Stepped Into the Light

It’s as if I’d lived all my life in a windowless room lit by flickering fluorescent tubes . . . and then one day, with the help of a friend, I opened a door in the wall and stepped outside into a glorious summer day at noon, with the sun dazzlingly bright in
a cloudless blue sky. I thought I knew what light was; I was wrong. Now I know that He is the Light (Holly E. Ordway, taken from Relevant Magazine).

I stepped out into the light this past week: a light that showed me just how much I had been letting the darkness in. No, it wasn’t that I had lost my faith, but it had become dull. A flickering fluorescent bulb if you will. Lifeless.

At Mission Arlington this introvert was surrounded by people 24/7. There were 45 college students, 500 other volunteers for the week, and over 1,000 kids total (I only interacted with about sixty)—that’s what changed my bulb. It helped me to realize how great it is to be outside. To roll around on a dirty tarp and color with a little girl named Faith (not kidding) and talk to her about the true Light. To “walk it off” with C.J. as he burst into one of his many rages. To drink in the few moments I did have to myself sitting out under the stars in our parking lot and take a moment to think of how big our God is. To look into the eyes of a Latina grandma who cannot understand my words, but understands the message and responds by blowing kisses until I am no longer in view.

Yes, this is the light. My fluorescent bulbs of routine, ritual, schedule, demands, work, etc. were overruled by the fluidity of a love for people—that is, the Light. Thank you, Mission Arlington, for being that friend who opened the door for me. I pray that I’ll have the courage to stay outside.

Mission Arlington and Me: A Youth Minister’s Perspective

I got the opportunity to spend Spring Break with a group of students serving on a mission trip to Mission Arlington. It was a fantastic week.

It was great to see our students serving outside of their comfort zones. We stayed in places where they normally would not stay. We went to places they normally would not go. We interacted with people that they normally would not interact with. And in all of that, they were able to see how big and wide and deep the love of God is. Not only for them, but for the
lost and hurting world that surrounds them. They were also able to see that they can make a difference. Their lives can count for something big.

I think that one of the biggest problems in most churches, schools, and other institutions that deal with teenagers is that they don’t challenge students to excellence. They don’t challenge students to completely exhaust their lives for the kingdom of God or convince them that they are capable of doing it and then give them the opportunity to do so in small ways. Mission Arlington did that for my youth.

Overall it was a busy week, a tiring week, a stressful week, a crazy week, but a good week in which glory and honor and fame was brought to God. Because we went and served and sang and colored and played and knocked on doors and loved, there are people in Arlington who know God loves them in a real and practical way.

CONCLUSION AND AN INVITATION

Some say that Mission Arlington is truly more caught than taught, and that may be so. Hopefully with this essay the reader will have at least a glimpse into the heart and life of this special place in Arlington, Texas. For those who want to experience it first hand, the Mission Arlington family extends an open invitation. As Phillip said to Nathanael in John 1:46, “Come and See!”

Jim Burgin is the son of Tillie Burgin. He works with his mom at Mission Arlington. He was the primary writer of this article.

Tillie Burgin is a lifelong resident of Arlington, TX. Ms. Burgin began her career teaching high school in South Korea where she and her husband served as missionaries. Tillie and her family started Mission Arlington in 1990, and she continues to serve her community there.
“God loves the drunkard in the gutter as much as he does the surgeon in the operating room.”

– Dr. Charles L. Roesel

First Baptist Church Leesburg, Florida doesn’t have a big sports complex. The youth group has to content themselves with sharing space at the facility dedicated to an after-school program across Highway 27. When Sunday school classes run out of space, they sometimes have to use the meeting rooms in one of the church’s four homeless shelters.

Yes, you read that right. This large Southern Baptist church has a 16-bed Children’s Shelter Home, a 30-bed Men’s Residence, a 16-bed Women’s Care Center, a Benevolence Center that serves 2,000 people food and clothing every month, a Pregnancy Care Center that serves 250 people per month, and the Samaritan Inn, a refurbished motel that offers free accommodations to up to eight homeless families at a time. The ministries are operated through the Christian Care Center, a $1.2 million per year charitable organization wholly owned by the church.

The Christian Care Center has become something of a community effort in the last 30 years, supported and staffed by Christians from many different denominations. No one believes it would exist if it were not for the leadership, vision, and pure determination of Pastor Emeritus Charles L. Roesel. At a time when the political excesses of Walter Rauschenbusch’s social gospel had scared many away from mercy ministries, Charles Roesel took Matthew 25:31-46 seriously.

“When I was growing up, Mama and Daddy always had a stray around,” Roesel said. “I learned then to love without limit. Then when I was at
Southern Seminary, I did some chaplaincy work at Ormsby Village for Boys. I remember teaching the Lord’s Prayer to a group of young men and one of them telling me, ‘If God is like my Daddy, I don’t want to have anything to do with him.’ That broke my heart.”

While still at Southern, Roesel served as pastor to a church that reached out to poor families in the Appalachian Mountains. After seminary, he became pastor of a church in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, where the church took ministry evangelism to the beach.

“In those days, it wasn’t uncommon for someone to get his car stuck in the sand on the beach,” Roesel said. “The tow companies could charge as much as they wanted, and the people would have to pay or watch their vehicles get just ruined by the salt water. So we made a dune buggy and offered to pull folks out of the sand for free. Then we would tell them about the love of Christ.”

In his next pastorate, he kept the soft spot in his heart for the marginalized and less fortunate. In the early 1970s, he established a home for abused girls as pastor of First Baptist Zephyrhills, Florida and reached 350 young girls with food, clothing, shelter and the love of Christ in just a few years. Then he got a phone call from First Baptist Church Leesburg, Florida.

“I didn’t want to come here. I was in a church where we had gone from 200 to 1,200 and baptized 1,400 people in this last 10 years. We had just a fantastic ministry,” he said. “But I told the Lord that if the vote was unanimous, I’d consider it His will. I thought I was safe because they hadn’t done anything unanimously in a long time.”

But God had other plans. After a unanimous vote, Roesel found a church that was, in his words, “wired together by organization, frozen together by formality, and rusted together by tradition.” The deadness of the church had practical results. Attendance had dropped from the 400s to the 200s in the previous decade, the former pastor had been fired, and the church baptized an average of five people or less per year. It was quite a shock after getting used to “bapticostal” applause during sermons and the “amens” at Zephyrhills.

“Any church growth book would have said, don’t go there,” he said. “I really did not want to come. I was happy where I was.” At the end of his first sermon, he asked the congregation to join hands and sing “Sweet, Sweet Spirit.”

“That afternoon I got a call from a man telling me that
he didn’t want the church to become charismatic,” he said. “He said another church had started holding hands and singing before they went charismatic. He also said it wasn’t right for me to ask them to hold another man’s wife’s hand, because, in his words, ‘You know what’s on a man’s mind when he holds another man’s wife’s hand.’ Well, I knew what he was thinking. He’d just confessed it.”

The next week, Roesel apologized and said he wanted to be more biblical. He then asked the congregation to greet each other with a holy kiss.

“Thus began the ministry,” he said. “And for five years they resisted ministry evangelism because of a maintenance mentality.”

The culture clash continued. When Roesel arrived FBC Leesburg was baptizing only a few people each year. Soon, the church was growing by leaps and bounds because of his continued emphasis on more traditional forms of evangelism. At its peak, FBC Leesburg regularly had 150 people show up for visitation on Monday afternoon. Eventually, the church averaged 300 baptisms per year for an entire decade. Still, everyone knew that Pastor Charles wanted to intentionally start reaching the destitute.

“I wanted to build a children’s home,” he said. “One man offered the building another offered the money. It passed by 51 percent. That was no way to start.”

After Roesel had preached on ministry evangelism for five years, his ideas began to gain traction. Others in the congregation began to catch the vision. The members of the congregation began to daydream about actually doing ministry evangelism in the numerous older houses in the church’s neighborhood in various states of disrepair. By the time Roesel retired in 2006, the church had purchased 31 parcels of land, including 28 houses, without incurring any debt.

Church members decided to open a rescue mission where homeless people could eat, spend a few nights, and go on their way. The opening of the rescue mission was not a grandiose event. Mildred Wolfe often tells the story of how she and her husband drove their little red Toyota truck around all over Lake County collecting furniture and other items as donations for an auction at the church’s gym.

“At that auction we raised enough money to begin the rescue mission,” she said. To this day, Wolfe volunteers at the Christian Care Center’s pregnancy ministry.
“We opened the Rescue Mission in 1982. We had buildings available, but they were not nice,” Roesel said. “If the termites had quit holding hands, they would have collapsed. There were buildings sitting there, so we used what we had. Even though we made many mistakes and got many knots on our heads, we learned a lot from that ministry.”

Humble beginnings or not, the church had caught the vision for ministry evangelism and has not looked back. Since that time, the Men’s Residence has evolved into a long-term discipleship program that houses more than 30 men at a time. Almost all of the men have drug problems and many suffered some kind of abuse in childhood.

The curriculum, as it has been developed for the last few decades, deals effectively with their issues. Today, FBC Leesburg Senior Pastor Cliff Lea, numerous members of the Christian Care Center board of directors, and dozens of other men take time out of their schedules to invest in the lives of these men. Ministry participants attend Bible study seven hours per day four days a week, go to church on Sunday, and provide the “muscle” for all manner of services around the church whenever needed. “Success rates” can be tricky in the ministry evangelism field, but time has shown that more than half of the men who complete the program leave with long-term sobriety. Even more importantly, the program has been instrumental in seeing innumerable men come to Christ and even become Christian leaders.

“One of the men who came through there was living as a homosexual before he came to us,” Roesel said. “Now, he’s free, he’s the pastor of a church, and is serving the Lord. And yet I still hear people tell me, ‘they can’t change, they can’t be saved, and they can’t be set free.’”

There were growing pains, to be sure. In the early days, some people didn’t like the element that the ministries attracted and let the pastor know about it in no uncertain terms.

“One fellow said, ‘I don’t think my wife and children should have to walk past those people when they go to church,’” Roesel said. “They left, and so did some others. But a whole lot more people came than left.”

Again and again, God confirmed Roesel’s desire to reach abused and hurting children in tangible ways. “A few years into doing ministry evangelism, we had a couple in the community that wanted to give $25,000 to start a children’s home and
their church didn’t want it,” he said. “Well, I’m a good receiver.” Later, a bank offered another $35,000 that had been designated for a children’s home and Roesel again practiced his receiving skills. “We had $60,000 from outside the church for a children’s home before we even got started,” he said.

In 1985 the church finally opened Roesel’s long hoped-for home for children. A couple in the church, Lee and Gail Evans, moved their two children into one of the houses near the church and began offering shelter to children who had been removed from parental custody by the state.

“We didn’t have fancy buildings or lots of money,” Lee Evans said. “Gail and some other people just felt like it was an important thing to do, and Charles was our leader and the most effective fundraiser.”

In the last 27 years, the Children’s Shelter Home has served almost 3,000 children. Today, the home averages between 14 and 16 occupants every night and is paid for by a contract with the state of Florida’s Department of Children and Families. That contract explicitly states that the children may participate in all of the activities of First Baptist Leesburg, whether it’s Sunday School, AWANA, youth camp or whatever else the children’s ministry staff organizes with. Hundreds of children have heard and accepted the gospel through the Children’s Shelter Home.

“Bob Buford came through on a tour once and wanted to hear about what kinds of things we saw. The worker on duty told him about a couple of brothers, 9 and 11, who had been so abused that they didn’t know what a bathroom was. They didn’t use utensils at the table,” he said. “They would tremble in terror when you tried to hug them. The morning after the first night they were there, their beds had not been touched and we couldn’t find them. They were huddled up sleeping on the floor in the closet. And it was our responsibility to love them back to normalcy.”

The church incorporated the Christian Care Center as a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization in 1985.

Many ministries were birthed as God spoke to lay people. Roesel feels his calling is not to birth ministries but to fan the flames in the hearts of so many who care so much. By 1987 he even found himself challenged by a church member to live out what he taught.

“A lady told me that I preached strong against abortion, but talk was cheap,” he said. “Then she donated the first
$5,000 to begin our Pregnancy Care Center. We now live in a nation where statistically you have a better chance of surviving death row than in a mother’s womb, so talk is cheap.”

Roesel said he was told not to have the church’s name on the pregnancy ministry or to place it on church grounds. With characteristic determination, he demurred. “That’s immoral and deceptive. It will be on our grounds and it will have our name on it. We are not in the deception business,” he said. “We started out seeing hundreds every month. We had 11 year old girls coming in who were pregnant.”

Roesel said the impact of the pregnancy ministry was immediate and deep.

“The greatest sermon ever preached at this church on Sanctity of Life Sunday was not by me but by a pastor and his wife who held the twins who had been rescued through the Pregnancy Care Center and that they had adopted,” he said. “That picture was worth many more than 1,000 words.”

The Women’s Care Center opened in 1989 as a mirror image to the Men’s Residence. That ministry serves a maximum of 18 women and served as the backdrop for the church’s 1996 film, “The Touch” which was produced by FBC Leesburg Executive Pastor Art Ayris.

An old saying goes, “salvation is free, but ministry costs money.” So where did First Baptist Church Leesburg find all of the money it takes to operate the ministries? Roesel says he found it when God moved the hearts of His people to give it.

“Never ask, ‘Can we afford it?’ but, ‘Is it God’s will?’” “Not long after we opened the Women’s Care Center, God spoke to me” he said. “God doesn’t speak to me audibly as he did to Samuel, but it was the strongest leading I’ve ever had in my life when the Lord said, ‘It’s not right to put these people up in junk.’”

The church had just raised $2 million for a Family Life Center, and the local economy had been decimated by two citrus freezes. Still, he was undeterred.

“We learn from Elijah that a God who cannot burn wet wood is no good,” Roesel said. “You don’t have to have ideal circumstances. So I announced to the church that God had laid this on my heart. And a lady came up to me who was not a member of the church and said, ‘I have a little piece of land I’d like to donate.’ I thought she was talking about a lot. She was talking about a lot.”

The plot of land was actually 40 acres that appraised for $825,000. She also wanted to make a cash donation of
$100,000. She went out to her house and got the cash out of a shaving kit.

One Wednesday night, another couple from the community asked to see a footprint Pastor Charles had already had an architect make of what would be called the Ministry Village.

“If you’ve got a vision, it’s important to put it in a form that people can see it,” he said. “The husband looked at the wife and said, ‘What do you think?’ She said, ‘Let’s do it.’ That couple, who were not members of our church, gave us $75,000.”

People continued coming out of the woodwork as momentum built to bring the Ministry Village into existence. “We had a man in the church who was so shy that most people in this church could not call him by name. He asked me one question, ‘Is it going to be first class?’” he said. “I told him it would be nicer than anything I’ve lived in to this point in my life. He gave $100,000.”

Rather than contacting fundraising professionals, Roesel told the church the Holy Spirit was raising the money. “I said, ‘Let’s not interfere with what He’s doing.’ At the end of the month, counting everything we brought in to that point, we had $2 million committed for the village,” Roesel said.

The work was not done. However the demand for the Children’s Shelter Home’s services had grown so great that Roesel saw a need for a second children’s home. The church had enough money to begin a second home but not complete it.

“I stood up in the first service and told them we needed $100,000 for a second children’s home,” he said. “They laughed; I didn’t.”

After the second service a man from Gainesville, Georgia, who was not even a member of the church came to Roesel and said he believed that God wanted him to give $100,000 for the second children’s home.

The community had begun to take notice of what was going on at First Baptist Church. The local hospital in Leesburg approached Roesel with a proposal to provide a nurse and liability insurance for the Ministry Village.

“All we had to do was provide the space. That was a no-brainer,” he said. “Later, they called up and said they had a lot of money they needed to give away. I told them they certainly knew how to call the right man. They built a first-class medical facility on our campus.”

The partnership between FBC Leesburg and the Central Florida Health Alliance is today called the Community Medical Care Center (CMCC) and pro-
vides free medical care to thousands of clients every year. Today, the hospital and the Lake County health department provide hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding. More than 50 doctors, both retired and actively practicing, volunteer their time. The doctors include cardiologists, orthopedic surgeons, general surgeons, pulmonologists, and many other specialists. Other doctors who do not actively serve at the clinic still help many clients for free as a result of referrals and favors to those who serve on the front lines.

The clients at the CMCC cannot have any other kind of insurance: no Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance. These are the people who would otherwise fall through the cracks and end up in the emergency room with a fever or a cold. Volunteers at the CMCC come from dozens of churches and share the love of Christ with these people when they are most receptive to the gospel. The CMCC has also launched a long-term chronic disease program which helps people with diabetes learn how to manage their treatment.

The financial aspects of the clinic’s success have not outstripped God’s miraculous provision in other ways. Years later, the current director of the CMCC went to speak at a Presbyterian church seeking a dentist to help clients. She didn’t find one; she got eleven. Today, more than 400 people per month receive free dental care at the clinic.

FBC Leesburg was not finished with ministry evangelism. A church across the street was dying and offered to sell the church its facilities, worth approximately $3 million, for $250,000. As had happened so many times before, a man from the church wrote a check for the entire amount.

Today, that church facility is home to the Genesis Center, an afterschool program that reaches roughly 150 at-risk youths every week with spiritual guidance, academic help and structure. Pastor Ken Scrubbs runs the ministry and enforces a balanced set of values.

“When they come in here, they know they are in a church,” he said. “We expect for them to respect the facilities and each other, but we also work hard to make it a fun place with the best in technology and the very best help that they can get as far as their schoolwork goes. We hire licensed teachers to help them. We want for them to have a positive impression of church, to learn to love God and respect each other and to introduce them to Jesus Christ.”

The Genesis Center regularly baptizes children who have accepted Christ at the ministry. At their 2011 Christmas party,
30 fourth and fifth graders were baptized. Scrubbs has been recognized by numerous prominent politicians, including Florida Governors Jeb Bush, Charlie Crist, and Rick Scott for his work with the children.

Churches often refuse to get involved in ministry evangelism for fear of not having enough funds or the threat of lawsuits. Roesel’s ministry testimony disproves both excuses. In addition to all of the miraculous fundraising, the Christian Care Center has never once been sued in its existence.

Many dynamic pastors have begun ministries that barely survived the end of their ministries. The real challenge is to help enough people catch the vision that the ministry continues once the pastor has left the ministry. Charles Roesel retired from the pastorate in 2006 and the ministry continues.

For almost 20 years, Art Ayris served alongside Pastor Charles and learned much from him about ministry evangelism, about leadership, and about a God who could burn wet wood. When the economic crisis of 2008 began to take a toll on the church and ministries’ finances, Ayris offered a typical prayer during a Christian Care Center board meeting.

“He asked for God’s help with our finances and that we could get a good deal on the Big Bass Motel,” Lee Evans said. “We all looked at each other like he was crazy.”

But Ayris negotiated a deal to buy the motel which adjoined Christian Care Center property, despite the economy. For years, the 18-room motel had been a thorn in the side of those trying to help people move from chemical dependency to faithfully following Christ at the Christian Care Center. Drugs, prostitution, fights, and every other kind of villainy frequently occurred at the Big Bass Motel.

The idea was to turn the former motel into a shelter for families that had been displaced been because of the economic downturn. The families must be economically homeless; that is, they can have no current substance abuse or criminal issues. The only rent they pay is to adhere to a case plan that they help craft which will address the barriers that have led to their homelessness. The program has no set limits, but the average stay is less than six months.

Making the Big Bass Motel the Samaritan Inn had its own share of challenges. It cost more and took longer than anyone expected, which is a general rule in construction. The community came together however.

“St. Timothy’s Catholic Community donated $25,000
to help us make the down payment," Samaritan Inn Director Chester Wood said. "They also faithfully send volunteers, money, and occasionally just call us up and ask if there is anything we need. When is the last time you heard of something like that happening?"

A Samaritan Inn work day looks like an ecumenical gathering, but with dirtier clothes and more smiling cooperation. At the last one in August 2011, 45 people from 14 different churches were there volunteering electrical, plumbing, painting, and other skills to help the less fortunate. The program has generated local, regional and national attention. The Christian Care Center often receives requests for information from other churches looking to replicate the Samaritan Inn’s ministry model.

In the first six months of 2011, 24 people, including 16 children, successfully transitioned from homelessness to economic self-sufficiency. Clients have their own “pastor” in Chester Wood, a deacon at FBC Leesburg. They are required to make appropriate life choices based on the contents of the Scriptures and regularly hear the gospel during their interaction with Samaritan Inn and Christian Care Center staff. Many residents and residents’ children have accepted Christ for the first time as a result of the ministry.

The Christian Care Center, like many nonprofits, had long sought to establish consistent revenue streams. In 2006, the first Thrift Store opened in downtown Leesburg. The problem was the location was too small and parking was impossible to find. So in March 2011 the Christian Care Center board of directors and FBC Leesburg agreed to open a much larger thrift store in another part of town. The new store opened in June 2011. Income projections ranged from zero to $10,000 per month. In November 2011 alone, the thrift store donated $25,000 to the Christian Care Center.

In addition to the revenue, volunteers at the thrift store have found that they are meeting people from the community who would never darken the door of a church. They come in looking for a bargain and go out having heard an encouraging word about Jesus and an invitation to come join the body of Christ in worship.

“MEETING NEEDS, SHARING CHRIST”

Among his many other interests, Pastor Charles has long been a friend of theological education. For years, he taught a class (in Florida, no
less) for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Ministry Based Evangelism program. He also frequently teaches at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Toward the end of his tenure at FBC Leesburg, national and international publications began taking notice of what was going on in the Christian Care Center.

“One of America’s most innovative churches looks conventional at first glance,” said Marvin Olasky in a 2005 World Magazine profile. “But the practice of ‘ministry evangelism’ serves the community and provides all the indicators of a healthy, growing church.”

In his retirement, Pastor Charles works tirelessly to advance ministry evangelism with the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board. He also still comes around to the Christian Care Center. He never ceases to be a source of wisdom, humor, support, and encouragement not only to me but to anyone affiliated with the Christian Care Center. He also remains involved in fundraising and in helping keep the ministries focused on the main things.

“The tendency is not to drift to evangelism, but from evangelism,” he said. “As a result of that passion of our people, our church had the privilege of seeing almost 7,000 people baptized during those almost 30 years. The church exists for evangelism as a fire exists for burning. We must never forget that.”

A few minutes in a room with Charles Roesel will give one a clear sense of how he changed the face of ministry in the small town of Leesburg, Florida. He mixes simple, sincere faith with operational audacity, sharp business acumen and a genuine concern for people. He does not allow himself to dwell on the “good old days” but every so often, he will say to someone, “I wish you could have seen this church when all of this got started,” with a twinkle in his eye. One gets the sense that he still stands amazed at the works of God that he has seen.

“People still look at First Baptist Leesburg as a leader in ministry based evangelism. A lot of times, they ask, ‘Why Leesburg?’, and if it’s a friend, they ask, ‘Why you?’” Roesel said. “My answer is always the same: God wanted the most ordinary place and the most ordinary pastor so that He would get all the credit and all of the glory.”
Dr. Charles L. Roesel currently serves as Presidential Ambassador for the North American Mission Board. Every year he preaches in dozens of churches all over the world and tirelessly promotes ministry evangelism as the best means he has found to bring people to Jesus Christ. He and his wife more than 50 years, Edna Sue, live on his ranch just outside Bushnell, Florida.

Samuel Smith serves as executive director of the Christian Care Center and the Community Medical Care Center, both of which remain closely allied with First Baptist Leesburg. He is also currently pursuing a Ph.D. in New Testament from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Jennifer, are raising their five children in Leesburg.
Over time God provided various resources to address the needy in our neighborhood. However my fundamental task was to evangelize in the lost community.

I embraced social ministries as a church growth tool after my first community survey in the Lakeshore Mobile Home Community near Marion, AR. I graduated from seminary at MABTS in 2003, and I had never considered social ministries in my academic studies. My family, without a congregation, in a debt free sanctuary at New Hope Baptist, struck out to revitalize the church. As I diligently surveyed the neighbors, two clear answers came back. First, the pastor needs to persevere long enough to be trusted in the community. For the past 30 years Seminarians staying for one to three years had marked most of the time at the church. The community required a longer tenure to break through trust barriers. The second finding indicated that people wanted something positive for children. So, after prayer and analysis, I threw away most of my training and adopted Henry Blackaby’s exhortation, “Look where God is working and join Him.”

God’s desires were already on display. I zoomed in on the kids and developed a bus ministry to bring them into the church. I borrowed teachers and vans from my mother church, Marion First Baptist, and started Sunday school and worship. The children had many needs in addition to salvation. Over time God provided various resources to address the needy in our neighborhood. However my fundamental task was to evangelize in the local community. As I began to proclaim the Gospel, others came alongside and demonstrated the Gospel to our neighbors. These “social ministries” did not supplant evange-
lism; they fortified it, magnifying the light of Christ. Social ministries demonstrated Christian love to our community. These opportunities became additional planks, building a platform of community trust and accelerated relationship building. The door to soul winning swung open. When I saw God doing these things, I stepped over the threshold into a world of church planting and evangelism I had not studied.

This article will detail aspects of ministries that have come to be in, through, or around New Hope. The cultural setting will be presented, the history of our church reviewed, and our various ministries explained and attested. Herein are the results to date of a women’s ministry—Hope House, a daily meal distribution, school supply days, a community Christmas celebration, activities for children, and the outcome of volunteer mission teams. These are “Loving Lakeshore” activities that God blessed and led to 100 believers’ baptisms by my seventh anniversary at New Hope.

MILIEU

New Hope thrives as a traditional mission church of First Baptist Marion, AR, in a mobile home community in the Mississippi River Delta, just two miles from the mother church, but engaged in a vastly different culture. Situated on the other side of the highway, the other side of the tracks, and the other side of the bayou; we shine the light of Christ to four trailer parks in the junction of I-55 and I-40. These four communities total about 500 home sites with an estimated 1,200 residents. Our mission church sits in the biggest of these parks, Lakeshore Estates, reportedly the second largest mobile home park in Arkansas. These communities, sandwiched between two towns clamoring for land and wooing new businesses globally, remain unincorporated because of the substandard private utility infrastructure and the obvious drug and crime problems in our streets. In my initial survey of the neighborhoods, less than 2 percent of the residents claimed Christ. I found an unreached people group like an unused hole inside the buckle of the Bible belt.

While some of the people in Lakeshore fall into the lower middle class category, the vast majority find themselves in old fashion Delta poverty. Within the region marked out by the SBC Mississippi River Delta project, New Hope ministers to the poor. Families move here to start over after divorce or incarceration. Many of the original residents are now elderly and
subsist only on social security retirement. Others rely on disability income from the government. The high school dropout numbers and adult illiteracy rates stunned me as I came to know the people. The “crazy check” (for mental or psychological disability) flows monthly into my neighbors’ mail boxes. The man of the house is rarely found living there and working. Too often the idle dead beat dads are just “scrubbin,” living off the welfare money others qualify for. Other men live absentee, wages garnished for child support, as “baby-daddy,” estranged from their children and the “baby-momma.” Traditional nuclear type families appear like mirages; most are shacking up, pretending to be married, with good intentions to get married someday. The 2000 census showed more households than cars in our church’s neighborhood. We are just a half mile from the county jail, and so many land at Lakeshore to live just a short walk from this facility so they can visit a relative. After hurricane Katrina a few refugees blew in, almost all with debilitating forms of post traumatic stress syndrome that remain unimproved. A variety of reasons exist for how people came to be in Lakeshore and in poverty, but Jesus told us the poor would always be with us. Our New Hope neighbors, then, represent a continual stream for those of us who are fishers of men.

Seemingly overlooked are the children, most of whom receive two free school meals a day. For some, school meals are all they get. Hunger runs just under the surface in Lakeshore. Our church is constantly vigilant for utility shutoffs which children usually suffer through in silence. The community playgrounds are no longer maintained by the park manager. Families are moving into trailers together. I am not surprised to find fifteen folk huddled in a single-wide, single family home. Unemployment is double the county average, which is also relatively high. Some people sleep in storage sheds or pick-up campers every day. Children here “come up hard.”

In a trailer park, “mobile” is the operative word. Most families rent for a short time. Many move after six months or a year after the lease expires. Some turnover challenges, similar to the mobility of our armed forces and the military chaplaincy, manifest themselves here. So, New Hope actively (and with urgency), pursues relationships with new neighbors utilizing a variety of ministries, including social ministries, compassionately meeting felt needs, but all aimed at sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, winning
some and discipling folk before our neighbors move along. “Redemption and lift” (the principle that as people come to Christ they tend to rise socio-economically) is a positive side to the turnover in the neighborhood, but bitter sweet to the church that carried them the life changing message. The neighborhood folk have accepted me and hung the nick name of “Papa John” on me. Here is the testimony of Eva Wilson regarding the impact the local New Hope setting had on one week-long summer volunteer at New Hope Baptist Mission.

My New Hope Testimony

My first discovery trip to New Hope in 2008 gave me an overview of the area. Then I came back with a spring-break mission team in March 2010. This time I got a close-up view of the extreme poverty. I had the opportunity to talk with some of the people who live there. One of my first impressions was, “These people are depressed out of their minds!”

Our team helped a couple who were Hurricane Katrina refugees. I had served in New Orleans, LA, in the Lower 9th Ward and in St. Bernard Parish. However, none of the houses I saw in New Orleans compared to these homes in Lakeshore. One family lived in a small camper-trailer near the entrance to Lakeshore. That RV rented for $400 per month with all utilities included. I thought to myself, “Are you kidding me? That’s highway robbery!” This couple battled physical problems. I think post-traumatic stress from Hurricane Katrina may have helped contribute to the depression they both were experiencing.

In the midst of the extreme poverty in this area, New Hope Baptist Mission lives up to its name and provides a ray of hope. The people need the hope that only Christ can give. But along with spiritual faith, they need help with their physical and emotional needs. New Hope Baptist Mission is committed for the long haul.

Solving the vast needs there will take many years. New Hope devotes much of its energy to serving children. With God’s help, the cycle of poverty can be broken for these children. New Hope is serving its
community in a way that few churches do.

I hope the Lord will allow me to come back for another visit to New Hope before too long. I am eager to see what God has been doing since the last time I was there.

**HISTORY**

A pastor from Marion FBC, Eugene Ray, planted the church in Lakeshore in the mid-1980s. He told me that on his first survey of the community, 400 people said they were not Christian. Lakeshore was a little smaller then. He said working there was like working as a foreign missionary. He began the church with Bible studies and had a core group of about fifteen people that loyally taught, witnessed, and worshipped there as the church was established. Forty congregants gathered on Mother’s Day 1985 with four professions of faith. But the roots of the social problems we now confront were already showing. Drugs, crime, and prostitution were on open display in the community from the very beginning.

Over time, much of the core group returned to Marion FBC. The community began to shift from mostly owner occupied places to tenants. The community started to have a high turnover. Residents were more transient than other segments in the neighboring towns. Soon the church started calling a string of seminarians to pastor. The community was constantly changing, and now they watched a church change pastors with May graduations. Soon, those long term community members, which formed the foundation of the church (then called Lakeshore Estates), began to move off. Our church returned time and again to First Church for help in lean times. I came along at one of those times. Below are some ministry activities leading to 100 baptisms by our seventh anniversary. We started with zero congregants. Testimonies from our evangelism and social ministries detailing our recent history follow as well.

**HOPE HOUSE**

Hope House is a private non-profit women’s ministry, a food bank, and a jail ministry. Each Sunday afternoon a few women from Marion FBC share the gospel in E-W, the women’s wing at the county jail, just a short distance from Lakeshore. When a donated mobile home for their first shelter house needed a location, New Hope offered an extra parking place with ready hook-ups right on the church
Hope House was invited to stay at New Hope on condition that one member from New Hope stay on their board of directors. I served on their board of directors for six years and am a past president. Mary Gibbs is the founding director of Hope House; she is also a member of Marion First. She, along with dozens of other regular volunteers, delivers many services. Now women looking to escape relapse to their previous life come to Hope House, and develop life skills and find victory in Jesus. Here is an example of a social ministry that wins souls, increases church membership, and coalesced around New Hope.

**FAITH MINISTRY AT WOMEN’S SIDE OF THE COUNTY JAIL BY HOPE HOUSE VOLUNTEERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Service Attendance Total</td>
<td>1291</td>
<td>1371</td>
<td>1321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One on One prayer</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Time Professions of Faith</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rededications</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>Did not report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibles Distributed</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Books Distributed</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>Did not report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reams of Paper Distributed</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HOPE HOUSE WOMEN’S SHELTER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnight Guest</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1169</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes/Food</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>3021</td>
<td>7534*</td>
<td>8780**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Gifts</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Dinner/Families</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Home from Jail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Tickets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motel Stay</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Population of Marion, AR ~ 12,000. Food provided equivalent of 2 weeks groceries for household.
**2011 food and clothing numbers breakdown as 3,725 households consisting of 2,784 children, 3,490 adults and 2,506 seniors

One must rejoice in the Christian labor of love reflected in these two charts above, especially the professions of faith. New Hope just gives Hope House a place to park their home.
MEALS

Nutritious meals are served each time our congregation meets. Children are also served a sack–meal after school during the academic year. During summer break, breakfast and lunch are served at New Hope. A private non-profit group, partnered with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, prepares and delivers the meals to our dining room. So many children turn out for these summer meals that a volunteer group from Mississippi decided to build a picnic pavilion that seats fifty. Our meal partners also provided bounce houses and water slides for our block parties. In the fiscal quarter ending February 2012, 13,500 meals were distributed through New Hope. New families dine in our kitchen every week. As a fisher of men, this is like fishing in a barrel. Picture this: dozens of church prospect families come in and sit there for thirty minutes or so every day. Our obligation in this meal service is providing staff (which are paid by our food providers), a place, and activities. We have coloring sheets, toys, playgrounds, a piano, and the church library.

Currently the government overseers have no objection to the way we operate. However a change in local administration or government funding puts continuation of this program on mutually agreeable terms at risk. I would rather combat childhood hunger with the direct support of God’s people. Currently, the only Christian entity helping New Hope with food funds is the Mississippi River Ministry of the SBC through the Arkansas Baptist Convention. We gratefully accept their hunger funds, but the quarterly funding is only a drop in the bucket considering our food distribution volume.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

School supplies have always come to us for the asking. In the last several years, school supplies have turned into a full family event. Last year three churches (Indian Springs, Bryant AR, Woodrow Baptist Church, Prim Arkansas, and Marion FBC, Marion Arkansas) came together providing and distributing supplies. God provided through the hands of partnering churches: book bags, paper, pencils, crayons, glue sticks, folder erasers, tissues, and hand sanitizer–almost the whole school supply list! Parents register the family. Everyone must be present to receive the supplies. Refreshments are available. Children pick out their own backpack filled with stuff. These bags are sorted by younger students and older students as
well as by gender. About 250 children, (around sixty-five families) registered and were geared up for school in 2011. Each year we see people saved and rededicate their lives on School Supply Saturday.

The following is the testimony of a former member, Billie Moore. She remembers the school supply distribution, and works at the Mt. Zion Baptist Association Office.

While we went to church at New Hope in Marion, we constantly saw God working in the small, poor group of believers. God showed His love for the community and the local body by providing in big ways that there was never any doubt it was God.

This small group of believers showed God’s love by distributing clothes that He provided. This may not seem like a big deal to you, but to people who have no money for clothes, this was a big way for God to show He cares for their basic needs. God allowed us to be involved in showing this community He loved them.

When each major event occurred, God used Southern Baptists to show how He loves our neighbors by providing the supplies needed. This local body could not have done it ourselves.

The church building was in bad shape and very crowded with children on Wednesday nights. We could not, as a small group of believers, have completed the work even if we had the money. God showed us He cared about where we were meeting by providing another mobile home for use. He sent mission teams to work on our existing buildings too.

During Christmas, God showed His love for this community and group of believers by providing a way to help with gifts. They would not have had much for their children, including food.

As believers, this was a great time in our lives attending where God was at work. We will always be grateful for that time in our lives.

**CHRISTMAS**

The neighborhood was not only poor, it was spiritually desolate. The first year I picked up discarded toys in the affluent neighborhoods in Marion.
I cleaned them up and refur-bished them. I invited adults in our church to come and “shop” for gifts for their kids and lis-ten to the hope found in the Christmas story. Then, we found various churches to help supply Christmas gifts.

Starting the next year, and each year since, another church collects shoe boxes filled with gifts for our kids. We provide the names and age of each child we registered at events throughout the year. They put up an “angel tree” and decorate it with the names of our children. People pick the ornaments and shop for the child within a modest limit. This is our own Operation Christmas Child. The last four years, First Southern Baptist Church, Topeka, KS, has adopt-ed the children of New Hope. They deliver the gifts. We let the children know God provided the gifts. Parents must accom-pany children to receive a gift. This ensures a family time and minimizes contention over who receives what. We eat birthday cake for Jesus and sing “Happy Birthday.” We sing Christmas hymns too. I preach the Word and extend an invitation. Moms and dads, boys and girls have professed Christ on this occa-sion over the years. This is a social ministry that addresses the poor and the lost in one swoop.

Here is a testimony of a family man that has traveled eight hours from Topeka, KS to Marion, AR, each of the last two years. Jared was so moved the first time that he brought his family and camera back the second year. I expect we will see his family and his church here again. Here is his story:

On a Mission to New Hope—by Jared Bohn, First Southern Baptist Church, Topeka, KS

For two years I have been blessed to have been part of a mission that my church is blessed enough to be part of. My church collects shoebox gifts for a month and then loads them on a van to be driven eight hours to Marion, Arkansas, at New Hope Church.

While the drive may be long, it allows good fellowship time for the volunteers. In the hours spent loading, driving, unloading, and setting up, it allows time for you to reflect on the fact that you have just brought gifts to children... some of whom may not receive another gift this Christmas. Most of these children are so long down the road of poverty and some to criminal lives, that it’s a blessing that “Papa” John would choose
to include them in his life. It’s a wonderful feeling to know that you have given these children reason to ask why someone would give them a gift without getting anything in return, and thereby opening the opportunity to recognize that God the Father did the same thing for each of us. We are all poor children of a sin-filled world, undeserving at best, and yet God did that for us! Even adults like me learn things from this mission.

It is a blessing to be part of this outreach. In the few short hours that we have with them, they impact our lives. We see hope brought into their lives, and we see those making decisions for Christ that will change their lives and impact their community. We see Pastor John using the registration cards for community outreach throughout the year.

What a blessing to witness Christ work through us, and to see the joy that His hand brings!

**CHILDREN**

Children’s activities showed as the one primary need in my initial community survey. Our eighty seat sanctuary is filled to capacity on some Wednesday nights with children from the bus. Starting off, we borrowed all our teachers from Marion First. Now our Sunday school is taught completely by New Hope members. We still borrow a couple of workers for children’s church, and on Wednesday the staffing for our six meetings is split fifty-fifty between Marion and New Hope members. What a joy to see New Hope grow in teachers! Where is the social ministry in all this? We serve a nutritious meal to every child, every time we meet, combating childhood hunger in the Delta. Some come for the food and some go home shining the light of Christ to family and friends.

**A Testimony from the Children’s Ministry at New Hope by Clista Wood and Ernestine Rogaisis**

There was a call for workers at First Baptist Church for someone to help New Hope Mission. The Lord touched our hearts and it has been a blessing of service to our Lord.

Since then, we have seen an amazing group of dedicated people leading New Hope. “Papa” John reaches out to other
church groups to give these children Christian role models and meet people who want to serve the Lord. The children grow in knowledge of Christ through fun activities and study groups led by these volunteers.

New Hope and the service of a dedicated pastor and his wife are God’s light in this community where it is desperately needed. It is a blessing watching the children grow in Christ, share their prayer requests, improve in self-discipline, and sometimes learn to smile.

New Hope serves as a mission in a community that needs Christ, and no other church is ministering to them.

**LITERACY & ADULTS**

A startling number of high school drop-outs and illiterate adults live in Lakeshore. We partnered with a community college for two years and taught G.E.D., as well as adult literacy using state certified volunteer teachers from Marion FBC at New Hope. Enrollment was good and a few graduated, but then the administrator over G.E.D. at the college changed. She did not like the church affiliation. We were unable to sustain the adult education. But two local families came to New Hope through adult education, resulting in conversions and nine baptisms. God provided; it was a great season.

English as a second language (ESL) was another literacy tool we employed to consecutively launch two Hispanic congregations. First, we found Pastor David Herrera, who established Iglesia Bautista Nueva Esperanza. We taught ESL, and the congregation grew and eventually relocated to Memphis. Then Pastor David Amaro used our ESL as an outreach strategy in establishing our second Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Bautista De Luz. They have relocated to worship at our mother church, Marion FBC. I remember phoning in some requested statistics to our state Baptist office. First, a silent pause, and then this statement, “We’ve never heard of a mission church starting another mission.” Again God used literacy training, a social ministry, to aid in the launch of two congregations.

**VOLUNTEER TEAMS**

New Hope utilizes a variety of volunteer mission teams from around the country to assist in soul winning. Groups New Hope
hosted include medical teams, construction and repair teams like World Changers, or handymen from other congregations, personal evangelism teams, Bible Clubs and Vacation Bible Schools (VBS), puppets, a bug display, block parties, outdoor movies, and sports clinics. Our New Hope conditions for accepting teams are as follows, Rule one: soul winning must be the main focus. Rule two: contact information must be collected for New Hope follow-up. Rule three: no red punch drinks. Rule four: serve as God has gifted you.

These construction teams have razed burnt houses, reroofed, and repainted others. One such instance is Diann Crouse. I went door-to-door with a volunteer evangelism team a few years ago on Passion Week Saturday. Our intent was to evangelize and invite folks to hear about the Resurrection the next day. We knocked on Diann’s door. She called out, “Who is it?” We indentified ourselves as being from New Hope. After “hemming and hawing,” she opened the door and said she had promised God if a church group ever came by, she would open the door for them. The young people witnessed to her faithfully. Diann didn’t accept the Lord that day but did accept a bus ride to church the next day, Easter. Diann has been with us ever since and is growing in her renewed relationship with the Lord.

That next summer World Changers painted and re-roofed Diann’s home in the Highland subdivision. I solicited donations from the community to make it happen. Then, the Saturday after Thanksgiving, a fire destroyed her house. Another team from Trinity Baptist, Pittsburg, KS, razed her house and cleared the lot. Floral Baptist Church painted and reconditioned Diann’s new rental house, even redoing the tile floor. They also went house-to-house doing evangelistic surveys in Diann’s area. Many touching moments happened as residents opened their doors. Floral Baptist also conducted a Bible Club on the main street in the center of the neighborhood. A children’s bus route was established as a result. As many as nine children still ride with us each week from this work a few years ago. From that group, David-Michael was baptized and I was able to be on a first name basis with everyone on two streets in this community.

Our biggest VBS team saw 185 enrolled with a peak day of 140 in attendance. Dozens of children have accepted Christ at VBS over the years and have been baptized. Prior to our meal ministry, we required visiting teams to serve breakfast and
lunch to the hunger-stricken children.

World Changers teams build a wheelchair ramp almost every year for some of our neighbors. They have re-roofed our church. One year they collected all the debris left on the roadside in Lakeshore: couches, scrap wood, and junk the regular trash collectors would not lift. Fifteen dump truck loads later, the trash mountain in our church yard was gone. That really opened the eyes of neighborhood leaders and revitalized the community council. Galvanized by the event, they still meet regularly three years later. South Oaks Baptist Church, Arlington, TX, repeated the same in a multi-tasked trip a year later. Souls were won, and the congregation grew on each occasion.

We also have held some sports clinics. One of my favorite New Hope photos is of the kids receiving soccer balls with the Gospel colors from the Wordless Gospel Booklet. Each break during the clinic, another piece of the Gospel was explained, color by color. We gave away a gross of balls. The Lord gave us a dozen new believers.

**CONCLUSION**

Some may be asking where do I find all these volunteer teams to help? There are plenty of workers available. I do not spend time hunting helpers. I have tapped into two great conduits that can pipe almost any type of group into New Hope at almost any time. Jackie James at the Arkansas Baptist Convention headquarters has a list of teams from all over the country waiting for places to serve in this state. The first powerful source I found was through the Mississippi River Ministry and their bulletin board for mission needs. This is the place to post needs and it is open to any eligible church in the Delta from the Ohio River confluence to the Gulf. Workers will come.

A variety of evangelism stories result from a number of social ministries. These ministries are supported primarily by Southern Baptist sources, and have proven successful in serving the lost community. Each one helped in establishing relationships with the lost and provided a platform for delivering the Gospel and winning souls at New Hope. Whether the mode of social ministry is meals or Christmas gifts, VBS, or building a wheelchair ramp, teaching the three “R’s,” or housing hopeful women, each service touches a church prospect and moves many toward salvation. One practical key—each of these Great Commandment ministries must collect contact data to entail individual follow-up to satisfy our Great Commission.
Personal evangelism is the aim of each visit. Sometimes funding and staff come from government, sometimes from non-profit groups, and sometimes from the church. God has worked here through manifold sources, the foolishness of preaching, and social ministries.

The results reflect in our church ranking, which is among the highest baptism numbers for small Arkansas churches during the last few years. To win souls, the Good News needs to be preached. A social ministry mindset moves the community into the congregation to hear the Word. New Hope is a demonstration of the pedestrian proverb, “people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Social ministries help us reach the lost and dying world with care, and the blessings are serendipitous, but only because Christ is in on it. The Great Commission and the Great Commandment, Gospel proclamation, and Gospel demonstration; the Good Word and good works: did the Lord ever intend for these to be partitioned?

John Rech pastors in Marion, Ar, at New Hope Baptist, a mission church of First Baptist Marion. He is also a student at MABTS. Eight years ago he was called to revitalize a church in a trailer park ten minutes west of Memphis, TN. He and Cathy have four adult children and eight grandchildren.
Love one another, as I have loved you

by Barbara Akins

Everyone in the world would say that they “love others,” so what is so different about this command? The difference is **how** we are to “love one another.”

We all have one thing in common whether we are an agnostic, atheist, or a follower of Christ; we all want to be loved. Actually, it is more than a “want”—it is a “need.” Unfortunately, not everyone knows how very much they are loved by the very One who created them.

Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). That is interesting! Is there something we can do as followers of Christ that will so distinguish us that “all men” will know that we follow Jesus? What is it that sets us apart in such a way that makes us distinctive or different from the rest of the world? What is the “this” in verse 35 that makes us so different, in fact, that the rest of the world will recognize us as followers of Jesus.

Jesus explained the “this” in verse 34, “...love one another.” Everyone in the world would say that they “love others,” so what is so different about this command? The difference is how we are to “love one another.” Jesus tells us how, “as I have loved you.”

Now that statement makes a huge difference. The way that Jesus loves is totally different from the way that people of the world love. So if we want to be known as Christ’s followers, if we want to be seen as different and point people to Christ, we have to learn to love as Jesus loves.

How does Jesus love us? Jesus loves us unconditionally and sacrificially. God’s love is without merit and without requiring anything in return. The love and grace of God is shown as we show His love through
action. When we help others, we never ask for anything in return. The act of service is all about grace just as God’s gift of salvation is all about His grace. We help others simply because He loves. When we love in the same way that Jesus loves us, unconditionally and sacrificially, it shocks non-believers. That kind of love will draw the lost to Christ.

When churches went to help those who suffered in Katrina, over and over people asked the question, “Why are you coming down here to help us for free?” Love that is truly selfless is completely different from how the world “loves.” Biblical love helps Christians be seen as truly different. The one thing that touches everyone’s heart is to be helped by someone who wants nothing in return. It sparks interest leading many who are helped to begin to ask, “Why are you doing this?”

Love shown by deeds prompts the opportunity to answer “why.” It is not enough just to show God’s love. We have to explain how God expressed His greatest love through Jesus Christ so that people may know Him personally. How will the world know of His love? God’s love can only become visible as we, His followers and the body of Christ, make it real through unconditional and sacrificial actions.

As I am writing this article, my husband Wade Akins and I just finished training pastors and lay leaders in Uganda. One of our leaders shared this story of how showing God’s love in a practical way can impact the most hardened nonbeliever.

A Ugandan pastor’s neighbor practiced witchcraft. The neighbor felt that the pastor and church were praying against him because his business failed. He then began doing things to harm the pastor. When the pastor would greet his neighbor, the neighbor would never respond. One day the neighbor was returning home and his motorbike broke down. He could not repair it. The pastor was also returning home on that same road. The pastor did not feel like he could stop to talk to the man, so he went to a nearby trading center and found a mechanic. He paid the mechanic to go repair the neighbor’s motorbike. The neighbor asked the mechanic how he found out about his problem. The mechanic told him that it was the pastor who told him and paid for the repair. This so deeply touched the neighbor that he actually screamed. The next Sunday...
he was in the pastor’s church and invited Christ into his heart. He is now faithfully sharing the gospel wherever he can." Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

Some Christians might argue that it is not right to help others, because our actions could be seen as manipulation to get the lost to say a prayer. I would agree that it would be wrong for Christians to make saying the “sinner’s prayer” a requirement before offering help.

We serve because we are commanded to do so and because God loves the hurting person. I believe that the greater tragedy would be to help someone with their physical needs and not offer them the chance to hear the greatest love of all. The churches’ motivation to show God’s love is not just to grow the church but to follow God’s command. Showing God’s love, His love is going to soften the hearts of the lost and draw them to Christ and to His church.

As we obey God’s command to show His love, we will always have an opportunity to share the gospel. Therefore, showing God’s love will always result in evangelism. Sometimes the evangelism will result in church starts or church growth, and sometimes it will result in Kingdom growth.

**EVANGELISM FOR KINGDOM GROWTH:**

Our desire is to always involve new believers in a church. In some projects it is not possible to initiate a church for new believers. In those cases, we always encourage the new believers to find a church. Below are just a few examples of groups with whom the churches should be involved, but may or may not result in church growth or church starts.

- Prisons
- Street children
- Unwed mothers
- Prostitutes
- Ministry to those on ships docked at ports
- Drug and alcoholic centers
- Abortion clinics
- Students

**CHURCHstartswiths:**

When my husband and I teach how to evangelize, make disciples, and start new churches all around the world, we teach how to “show God’s love in a practical way.” The participants of the training we just completed in Uganda and Tanzania have thought of ways they can show God’s love as
they go to a new village to start new churches:

- Help people carry water from the pump or river to their homes
- Clean the trash from an area of the village
- Help to plant their crops or to harvest the crop
- Help to build a home or install a roof on a home
- Tutor children
- Fill potholes in the road
- Give the sick transportation to the hospitals

We saw these examples put into action by a pastor friend in East Africa. Dawson, a pastor in Kenya, felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to visit a village. He was standing there when a man asked him if he was lost. Dawson said, “No, but maybe I should talk to you.” They continued their conversation over a coke inside a bar. After sharing about the love and salvation of Jesus, the man prayed to ask Jesus into his life. Dawson then went to the counter to pay for his coke. There were ten men at the counter drinking. One of the men looked at Dawson and said, “I know you, you are a pastor. We come in here to hide. If you pastors come in here, where will we hide?”

Dawson laughed and then offered to pay for the men’s drinks. As he was walking out the door, the same man yelled out to him, “Come back here! If you are going to pay for our drinks, you must pray for us.” Dawson prayed for all the men and then one of them invited Dawson to go to his home and pray for his family. This opened the door for Dawson to send one of his lay members Herbert to teach the Good News stories to these men and their families. They now have started five new house churches in that village. Six of the ten men gave their lives to Jesus. Five of them are the leaders in the new churches. Herbert meets with these new leaders every week, and Dawson meets with them twice a month to mentor them as they lead the new churches. It does not take a huge program or a lot of money to show God’s love in a way that will open the door to start new churches.

Examples of showing God’s love in a practical way do not occur only overseas. One can find churches in our backyard following the same principles. The Community Missions Ministry of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis under the direction of Rev. Phil Weatherwax has been involved in starting two churches in the low income areas of Memphis, TN: 1) Chief Cornerstone Church, and 2) Impact Baptist Church and Ministries. Weatherwax said that the weekly outreach min-
istries they used to make their presence known in the community as well as minister to the physical and spiritual needs of those living in the community were an integral part in the growth of these two churches. They have grown from 12-15 members to 250 and 200 respectively.

Tom Baugh, a volunteer in Bellevue’s Impact Ministry, said that many who first came to the center for help are now the ones helping others. He said that all of them have said, “they remember that they came looking for a handout only to discover that the greatest gift they received was a personal relationship with Christ and that there is greater joy found in helping others.”

Smaller churches in the Memphis area have followed a similar pattern. Island Community Church targets an upscale neighborhood on the banks of the Mississippi River. Meeting these individuals’ physical needs are quite difficult—they don’t need food, clothing, shelter, or money. However, this church noticed that many of the island dwellers jogged in a local park. Once a week the church delivered free bottled water to people who passed by. The church members didn’t preach to the individuals, but instead handed out water with nothing more than a greeting. If asked, the church member would then explain what they were doing. This created immense goodwill among the people of the area, and also led to several visits per month from individuals who had received the water.

Another example of love in action can be found in New York. In August of 2009, Derek and Dana Duncan moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, to start a church in Dutchess County, about an hour and fifteen minutes north of Manhattan on the Hudson River. Derek Duncan talked about how much fun it is and how starting a church is a “live lab.” Derek said, “It’s fun to try things to see if they will work.” He says it is about building relationships with the community.

They began to reach out wherever they could and show God’s love in an unconditional and sacrificial way. Every Tuesday night the church gave out hot meals to the homeless. As they shared food, they got to know the individuals and helped the homeless get off the street. They were able to teach one man who had a master’s degree how to use the computer and how to start a business. He is now walking with the Lord again and has his own apartment and is building his business.

Duncan tried other approaches as well. He offered the church building or the
churches’ services to help the local high school in anything they could.

His daughter, Elizabeth, was able to begin a Christian club in the high school. She stood by herself at the flagpole to sing and pray on “See You at the Pole” day. As a result of that day, she was able to find a few others interested in starting a club. The church and the club have done numerous social projects for the school, the teachers, and the families of the students.

- For Thanksgiving and Christmas the club helped to get clothing, shoes, bedding, and food for the students’ families in need.
- The club adopted a special needs class and had a Valentine’s Day party for them.
- Weekly the club writes letters to the teachers thanking them for all they do and letting them know that they are praying for them.
- The church refurbished a courtyard in the school that had been neglected and was run down. They worked several weekends to transform the courtyard. They continued to keep it up 2 weekends a year in April. One year they planted a rose garden and the principle wanted to dedicate it. He invited Derek to pray! This proved significant as no pastor had ever been asked to pray in that school.

“It’s not just about giving.” I was very interested in what Derek said, “It is not just about the people we help but the image it presents to the community about the church. As the church showed God’s love in tangible actions the entire community began to change their preconceived ideas about the church. Those who have had little contact with the church began to believe that the church truly cares and loves others. Some changed from not wanting to have anything to do with the church or God to asking questions about and being willing to listen to our story.”

Duncan said that many times as they are feeding the homeless, painting, or digging dirt, people will mention that they have never seen a pastor get dirty before.

Derek also mentioned that it is, “not just about what we are giving as a church, but more about what the church members get.” The projects give an opportunity for the new believers to deepen their faith.
He said that he could not say enough about how God works in the lives of believers and grows their faith as they become involved in reaching out to the hurting and needy.

As they have planted these seeds of love all over the community in so many ways, that demonstration of love prepares the hearts, and they become open to God’s Word and His work. In just 3 years Derek and Dana have grown a church in a very resistant area to sixty members.

This principle works in an overseas setting extremely well. I learned this principle as a missionary in Brazil. A very few weeks after I arrived in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, as a career missionary, there was a flood in Teofilo Otoni, Minas Gerais. It destroyed 500 homes. Working with what was called at that time, the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) of the SBC, we received funds to provide food for these families until they were able to get their next pay check. The local church then requested that we help them build some homes for these families that had nowhere to live. The city gave land and the FMB provided funds to build seventy new homes for the displaced families. Over and over the Brazilians said, “I just can’t believe that there are Americans that would give money to help Brazilians they do not know!"

During the months that the families themselves were building their homes we met with them and did evangelistic Bible studies. The unconditional and sacrificial expression of love made them willing to hear the Word of God. At the completion of the construction project, Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, TN, sent a team down to build a church building where the new believers and new home owners could meet and worship. It became a thriving community, and in the very center was a growing church.

In like manner, we once had a medical team to visit in Brazil. The first day very few showed up because, even though we had told all the churches and passed out flyers all over the city, no one believed that anyone would give away free services. After the first day, there were long lines every day. For a week, six doctors and pharmacists saw 1,800 people who needed some kind of medical help.

At the end of the week we had an open air evangelistic meeting. Because of the impact made by giving free medical assistance and building a church building in one week, about 3,000 people showed up for the open air meeting. At the invitation the church got names and addresses of 500 people
who showed interest in knowing Jesus. The church visited those families and started Bible studies in 126 homes. From that the church was able to start 6 new preaching points.

I once attended a seminar by Steve Sjogren. He is one of the most successful pastors I know that has used “showing God’s love in a practical way” for both church planting and church growth. He was knocking on doors and doing all he knew to do to start a church in Cincinnati but with no success when God said to him, “If you will befriend my friends, I will send you more people than you know what to do with.” In answering the question, “Who are God’s friends?” he realized that, “Though Jesus loved everybody, ... His heart especially went out to the poor, the sick, and the lost.”

What he calls Servant Evangelism was born out of his idea that, “If I could somehow relieve an ounce of the pain someone was going through, maybe then we could get that person’s attention. ... maybe then we would have an audience.” Steve began to send people out every week to show God’s love in a practical way. Over time God grew a mega church. Sjogren believes that in our search for the most effective way to evangelize, we have at times overlooked the most obvious: “Doing humble acts of service causes the world to notice our lives and to listen to our message.”

Acts of kindness change how the lost perceive both the church and our method of sharing. “Deeds of kindness get people’s attention and often causes them to ask us questions. Instead of having a forced presentation of the gospel to people who really aren’t interested in what we have to say, we find people are curious and ask us to explain what we’re about after we’ve served them.”

Steve’s following words give insight into what he has learned from years of showing God’s love in a practical way.

It seems people don’t necessarily remember what they are told of God’s love, but they never forget what they have experienced of God’s love.

Before we share God’s words of love with a hurting world, we must first be willing to do deeds of love with the heart of a servant. We must balance the speaking and the doing of the gospel—the words and the works of God—if we expect to gain an audience with the watching world.

Our society expects to be preached at by
enthusiastic Christians. It is almost shocking to unbelievers when we break that expectation by offering simple, practical demonstrations of God’s love.

Deeds of love allow us to sneak into the hearts of those we serve.

But they aren’t enough on their own to bring someone to Christ, but they do create phone wires for transmitting the spoken message.

If we don’t follow our actions with words, they will only know that we are nice people, not that God loves them.

**CHURCH GROWTH**

We have had several church teams accompany us to Tanzania to train adults, share the gospel in schools, and have open air evangelistic meetings. We also show God’s love by giving away reading glasses. The impact is indescribable.

In Shinyanga, Tanzania, someone contacted his uncle to tell him that the church was giving away glasses. The uncle refused to believe that anyone would give something away for nothing. After much urging, he finally went to the church and received a pair of reading glasses for free. The uncle said, “Now those are real Christians!”

In Bariadi, Tanzania, the pastor said that not one government official was even aware that their church existed, and very few in the city knew of his church. After the first day of giving away reading glasses, the word got out and lines began to form. All the government officials showed up to get their glasses. By the end of the week the pastor was overjoyed that now everyone in town knew about his church and was talking about the gift of glasses.

One Muslim student needed more than just reading glasses. Travel was provided to the city to get her eyes checked and to purchase the glasses that she needed. Another student was losing her hearing. She was also provided transportation and funds to see a doctor and get the required help she needed. Her parents expressed that they had never seen anyone help another in that way. The following Sunday the Bariadi church of sixty members had twenty-eight new visitors.

Another example is Bellevue Baptist in Memphis, TN. They have begun an outreach called Bellevue Loves Memphis. Four times a year they spend a Saturday spreading out all over the Memphis area to do acts of kindness.
They partnered with Park Avenue Baptist in east Memphis to offer a free car wash. Along the road beside the church parking lot they put up large signs: “FREE CAR WASH” on one side of the sign and “CAN WE PRAY FOR YOU?” on the other side. They never could have imagined the response. Many did want a free car wash, but others stopped to say, “I don’t want my car washed, but I do need prayer.” Still others after receiving prayer said, “Wait, I’ll be right back with my family.” Such a simple expression of love and concern as a prayer opened up so many doors where the church could follow up with visits. Eight people accepted Jesus that day and were baptized.

This last year Bellevue started a new project in partnership with thirty churches from around Memphis to work together in Jesus Loves Memphis.

The projects of Bellevue Loves Memphis for March 3, 2012 included:

1. City of Memphis Clean-up Project
2. Politely inquiring of prayer needs from pedestrians and prayer with them, seeking to share the Gospel in conversations, handing out Gospel Tracts, and distributing care packages to homeless/needy on Beale Street Outreach Project
3. Visiting critical care waiting rooms and ministering to the families who have sick or injured family members at The Med and St. Francis Hospital-Bartlett
4. Doing cleanup and maintenance projects on a neighborhood school campus; installation of new lighting in classrooms
5. Ministering to the single moms through a time of pampering and sharing of the Word at Tulane Apartments Women's Retreat
6. Assembling shelving units and organizing a storage room of items used for emergency family situations at Department of Children Services
7. Painting fences and flower bed maintenance and mulching at Tennessee Baptist Children's Home – Boys Ranch
8. Doing health screenings for individuals of the Frayser Community at Impact Ministries Medical Clinic
9. Cleaning the Neighborhood of Douglas and Brooklyn Avenues
10. Preparing sack lunches and home-made cookies for the families who are staying at the FedEx Family House Project while their children are being treated at Le Bonheur
11. Providing a choir presentation for the residents of Rainbow Health and Rehab facility
12. Going door to door to do evangelism in the Foote Homes community and exterior painting on the Miracle Baptist Church building
13. Sorting, counting, and banding together shoes that have been donated to send overseas

So “why” do this? Why go out and show God’s love in an unconditional and sacrificial way?

1. Jesus did. Just a casual reading of the New Testament Gospels will give evidence that Jesus helped those in need. He is our model, and we are to live as He lived.
2. Jesus commanded us. Paul said, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” A lawyer asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus answered, “Go and live like the Samaritan who cared for the man robbed on the road by showing mercy on him.”
3. Jesus commanded us to “Make disciples”. We commonly call the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:19-20 the Great Commission. What did Jesus command us to do? Make disciples! In order to make disciples we first have to share Jesus. Showing God’s love God’s way prepares the soil of the heart to be open and willing to hear God’s truth.

It is all about planting seeds of love, and Jesus said if you do it in God’s distinctive way, “they will know that you are my disciples." The world will know that the church is different. The world must see God’s love in action to understand that the church cares for them.

Barbara Akins served for years as a missionary with the International Missions Board in Brazil. She is married to Wade Akins. They travel the world and teach people how to start new churches. They have trained believers who have started hundreds if not thousands of churches. Barbara and Wade live just outside of Memphis, TN.
The pastor taught me about multi-housing ministry, what it meant to serve God by serving others, and how to share the truth of the gospel within the context of inner city Memphis.

My journey began around 2001 when God began to move in my heart. Growing up as a pastor’s son and seeing the many difficulties my dad faced led to no desire on my part to do vocational ministry. However, God had different plans. He began to stir my heart and reveal that I had held back a part of my life from Him. I was not fully committed and surrendered to His plans for my life. After a time of immersing myself in Scripture, prayer, and contemplation, I knew God was calling me to a place I never wanted to go. I also knew that if I was to completely surrender my life to God and be at peace, it meant my life, my family’s life, and all that we were, belonged to Him to use for His purpose. I began to pray that if God would have me surrender into vocational ministry that He would place a burden for the lost and to proclaim the gospel in my heart as He did the Apostle Paul when he proclaimed, “woe to me if I do not preach.”

After surrendering to full time ministry, God led me to return to school for training in ministry and theology at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Within a month or two of beginning classes, I was offered the opportunity to work at an inner city church plant that met within a remodeled doublewide trailer settled in the middle of a large apartment complex. The church’s pastor taught me about multi-housing ministry, what it meant to serve God by serving others, and how to share the truth of the gospel within the context of inner city Memphis.
One remarkable component of the complex was the number of children living there. Most lived with their mothers and siblings or other family members like aunts or grandmothers. Because of the large number of children, the church developed an after school program. The children would come to an apartment and receive help with homework and school projects. Volunteers would come from local churches and colleges and help with the program. In addition to helping with schoolwork, relationships were developed with the children and their parent or caregivers. Many opportunities to share the gospel were developed out of these relationships. Bible studies were held on Tuesday night in addition to Sunday worship and Sunday school classes. Many of these same kids and their parents/caregivers found their way to the Bible studies and worship services.

As other needs arose, God provided the means to meet them for the community. Every time a need is met, it is an opportunity to share God’s love with that the individual or family in a real, tangible way by showing the life changing power of salvation through Jesus Christ. The church offered school supplies, job interview skills and training for adults, and a clothes closet in addition to meeting other family specific needs. In the time we served there, we saw lives changed by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One aspect of this ministry where God really demonstrated His sovereignty in the endeavor was in the apartment complex owner’s involvement. On any mission field, God often brings a “person of peace” to aid the missionary in his work. In this case, the owner of the complex provided space for the double-wide trailer, which functioned as a worship center, office space, and the apartment for the after-school tutoring program. He also provided the utilities for the spaces. Over the years the number of apartments in use grew to four, and an additional trailer was installed and provided free of charge. God taught us that where He calls, He provides, not just spiritually but materially as well.

After serving about a year, my wife and I began a similar ministry in another apartment complex, owned and managed by the same person. This complex was newly built but rented to the same clientele. We began as though we were planting a church by trying to meet the people of the apartment community, learn about their needs and issues, and find ways to share the gospel and pray God would bring them to Christ. Even though we had space and
utilities provided, we sought out persons of peace to help us build relationships within the community. We were able to begin a successful Bible study and had several pray to receive Christ. We offered snacks and food at the Bible study as well as information on how to have other needs met. One Muslim family began to come to our Bible study. The grandfather, who migrated from the Middle East, spoke little English. His grandsons would ask questions for him, and we would communicate the best we could. He was impressed with our “friendliness” and willingness to help him and his family being this was only a couple of years removed from 9/11. He told us that we treated him better than the people at the local mosque. He loved America and proudly wore a “USA” hat most of the time I saw him. He never professed Christ but heard the gospel many times. We gave him a Bible in Arabic and other gospel materials, but he would have never crossed our path without God using us to meet his family’s physical needs. God began to impress upon my heart some key Scriptures, just as the Lord proclaimed in Luke 4:18-19, that we too should proclaim the gospel of Christ to the poor. Only He can heal the broken-hearted, liberate the captives, and give sight to the blind. Only Jesus can give liberty to the oppressed. This is our message. It was just a few months before God moved us from this ministry to our next assignment.

One summer my wife and I went to Rochester, New York, for the purpose of visiting with a local ministry that was seeing success working in multi-housing. We flew to Albany, N.Y. and drove from there to Rochester. It was a successful trip. The weather was beautiful and the people were very nice. On the way home my wife said it was a wonderful place to visit, but she would never want to live there. Six months later we had a moving truck carry all our belongings to Schenectady, NY. After we had our visit there, an inner city church plant in need of a pastor called and asked me to pray about becoming their pastor. My wife now says, “Never say what you will never do, God may very well change your plans.”

It was January in up-state New York, and I began to pray and ask God to show me what He would have me do as pastor of His people at Hamilton Hill Fellowship. I had never pastored a church and certainly knew nothing of the people of inner city Schenectady. Fortunately, he placed me in the midst of some very godly men and women. Mid-America Baptist Seminary has a Northeast
Campus, and the men there were instrumental in helping me find God’s plan for our church. Additionally, God had men in place at the Hudson Baptist association who would pray for me and give godly advice and compassionate help. It was truly a great blessing to be surrounded by committed Christians and knowledgeable men who had a heart for the lost and for service.

One of the first things we began to do was examine the people of the church. Who were they, and why did God call them out to be a part of this particular local body of believers? There were only five core believers and their families who attended. Over time we would have some members who had served time in jail and some who had been addicted to drugs, alcohol, or gambling. Some who had sold their bodies on the very street and in the very building in which we met and worshiped the King of Glory began coming. We were a family of five so we doubled the church membership immediately. However, misleading statistics aside, God showed us the people of the church were there because they too had a heart for the lost and specifically for that community. This led us to a better understanding of the community. We began to research and study the community at large. Some of the core group grew up in the community, when it was a much nicer place. Others had experienced the hardships of the community, and God had saved them out of their misery. Years earlier, the community was full of working class Italian, Jewish, and Polish people. Most people in the community worked for General Electric or American Locomotive. In the mid twentieth century, G.E. employed over 50,000, producing everything from light bulbs to appliances. American Locomotive was out of business by 1970, and by the 2000s, many of G.E.’s jobs were moved out of the country leaving less than five thousand workers and a huge socio-economic hole in the community. In 1950, Schenectady was a thriving population of 92,000, but by 2007 it was less than 62,000. It was once said that Schenectady, N.Y., “lights and hauls the world.” The city’s nickname was “electric city.” A 2007 article in U.S. News and World Report entitled “The Forgotten New York” called the city a “dim bulb and the first stop in a long, bleak road that runs through much of upstate New York.”

The Hamilton Hill community, within walking distance of the G.E. plant and once vibrant with working families, became a place of high crime, low income, drug and alcohol abuse, broken families, and broken lives. A
local believer, whose son is a police officer in Brooklyn, N.Y., told us much of the drugs coming into New York City came through Schenectady and specifically Hamilton Hill. The community consisted primarily of African-American, Latino, Guyanese, Anglo, and Middle Eastern people groups. There were pockets of Hispanic people groups from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. This was the fastest growing segment of the population, and often meant ministry needed to be done through an interpreter for those of us who did not speak Spanish. There were several Spanish speaking businesses and churches in the community. However, the churches were small and ineffective in sharing the gospel. Most in these people groups were Catholic. There were also many Guyanese in the community—as many as 6,000. Of these, their heritage was Indian-Guyanese and many were Hindu. There were two Hindu temples in the Hamilton Hill community and, at the time, a Hindu owned local grocery which sold idols and other Hindu religious items. A small group of Pakistani people lived in the community as well. An Islamic learning center, located in an old house, was used as a Muslim place of worship.

We began to pray and think through a purpose statement and vision for our people. We developed a statement that expressed God’s purpose for a local church placed within the context of the inner city of Schenectady. God had called us to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through witnessing and discipleship shown mainly by trying to equip those who live in the inner city. How we would carry out God’s purpose for us was expressed by the acronym “LOVE.” The "L" stood for “Loving our community by ministering to their physical needs.” The ‘O’ stood for “Obedience to the Father by living holy lives.” ‘V’ was for “Vying for the lost by evangelizing our community,” and ‘E’ stood for “Equipping the saints by preaching and teaching the word of God.” God drew this church together because of their love for Him, their love for the community, and a desire to see people from all the nations represented come to Christ.

God blessed us with many mission teams to come and work with us. Some were from local churches. These accepted Jesus’ command to make disciples beginning in Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. Our community was a Samaria to many Christians in the Capitol district. Other teams came from different parts of the country.
This was very important as our church was not large enough to carry out larger ministry efforts. One of the primary ways mission teams helped was to increase our ability to serve more people more efficiently around the homes and places people congregated within the community. We trained teams to speak to people, to share their faith, and to help us find new ways to meet the needs of the community. We were always asked about activities for children. Moms wanted activities for their children, to keep them out of trouble during the summer and during times they were not in school. Requests for children’s activities led to several different ministry efforts.

The church, with the invaluable help of mission teams, held Bible schools and Back Yard Bible clubs in the parks around the community. We tried, as much as possible and as much as the weather allowed, to always work outside or away from the church building. We wanted the community to know our church more for who we were than by where we met. It was more effective to pass out invitations to ministry events via local businesses and person-to-person for the purpose of inviting the adults and kids to the parks where they were already playing. We worked with the local YMCA to provide activities, games, and crafts to kids playing in the park. We used sports ministries to reach large groups of youth. The leaders of the summer programs at the local ‘Y’ were Christians but could not share their faith in their official capacity. However they allowed us to come along beside them and share Christ, and this led to many opportunities for building relationships and sharing the gospel. Over the years, a number of kids gave their lives to Christ and began to attend church.

We always tried to emphasize Christian holidays and holidays with direct Christian influence, such as Thanksgiving. To help with the need for wholesome children’s activities, we once held a fall festival inside our very small facility. It was one of the most successful events we ever had. A local church came and helped us as we provided games and activities based on Scripture. We had a Christian illusionist who shared the gospel through his slight of hand. After he would perform an illusion, he would show the kids how he did it and that really kept them interested.

For several years, we held a live nativity in the local park. Our local sponsoring church, Trinity Baptist, their youth, and a wonderful family from their church with many horses, sheep, and llamas came and
performed an interactive musical play, which brought to life the Christmas story. Church members not participating in the play would speak to people, pass out hot chocolate and cookies, and share the gospel when the opportunity arose. Children and adults would come and see the birth of Christ and hear the good news of peace on earth, good will toward men.

Thanksgiving was also a great time to demonstrate the gospel. We invited people to come to our facility and share a meal with us. Another local church, which had a number of restaurant professionals, came and worked with us. Our people prepared traditional holiday food. Tables were set and people were invited. Many of the people were homeless street people. We took their orders and served them like they would experience in a restaurant. We gave them as much as they wanted and sent leftovers home with them. While they ate, a local youth band played for them. Those from our church not serving food, sat with people and talked, shared their faith and spoke of the One who is the bread of life.

We also held block parties and concerts out in the streets. We would canvas the neighborhood with fliers and invitations to come and be part of the festivities. The block parties attracted both adults and children as well. We invited local businesses to participate by setting up booths or supplying food or door prizes. The businesses were able to receive good will and free advertising by helping support the events. Our local Baptist association owned a trailer that churches could rent and reserve. It contained a bounce house, grill, tents, snow cone maker, popcorn and cotton candy machines, and necessary supplies. Stations were set up to serve all who came. At each event a speaker or musician would share the gospel. At several concerts, we gave invitations and had many people come forward, some to be saved and others to get their lives right with Christ. Several times concerts were held outside the local rescue mission. The mission had a great outdoor venue overlooking part of the city. Because of the large number of African-American and Hispanic teens, and the influence of street gangs, we held Christian rap concerts. The local rappers who worked with us preached the word of God through song and proclaimed salvation through Christ alone.

A good relationship was established with the leadership of the City Mission, and they allowed us to come many times to share Christ through word or song. The City Mission is
one of the oldest and largest in the area. They offer addiction/recovery programs for men and woman, a battered women’s shelter, and a community meal every day except Sunday as well as many other services. Homeless people can walk in at anytime and find a place to sleep. Above all, it is a place that cares, holistically, for the body and the soul. There is a chapel everyday, and I preached there regularly. I also taught a weekly discipleship and Bible study for men who were part of their very rigorous drug rehabilitative program. As part of our church’s commitment to minister to the community, we served a community meal, and we provided Christ honoring events and worship services.

Anyone who has worked in an inner city ministry knows the only thing you can count on is the unexpected. We were often met with the unexpected and learned to always be flexible. God is in control and may be working in a way in which you were not aware. One example of this occurred when we worked all week to plan a block party on the street next to our facility with a mission team from Mississippi. On the very day we were to hold the party, it rained as if the next great flood was about to occur. We prayed and asked God what to do. We could not hold the event outdoors as planned. We had a garage attached to the church building, but it was not very big and who would come anyway? We decided to set up a few stations in the garage. After we began to eat our own popcorn, snow-balls, and soda since we didn’t want it to go to waste, people began to show up. Thirty people came in out of the pouring rain. They dried off, we laughed and played. We were able to spend much more time with these few than we would if the normal two to three hundred people had come. By the end of the day, five people had given their lives to Christ. We praised the Lord and knew this was His plan from the very beginning.

There are other ways God brought ministry opportunities to our church. On several occasions people would wander in to our service intoxicated or on drugs. They would ask for help of some kind, normally cash, food, or clothing. If another ministry provided a good service in the community, we did not try to duplicate it. We simply referred those with a need to those who could meet it. Once a man came into the Sunday morning service in a tee shirt, sneakers, and a light jacket wrapped around his mid-section and nothing else. I determined that day we would always have at least some clothes on hand for men and women, just in case.
We were often asked for food. Even though the city mission offered free meals every evening, they were prompt in closing the doors. It seemed people always had needs when other ministries were closed. Some looked at this as a nuisance, we tried to see it as God bringing opportunity to share Christ to our door. If the cost of sharing the gospel were a few cans and boxes of food, we considered it a bargain.

There are many more stories that could be told of instances where God allowed us the opportunity to serve others. We helped people with home repair projects, packing and moving, and other daily issues and problems. I think He gave us these opportunities because He had placed in us a greater desire to see people saved. Jesus has a message for the suffering, and it is our work to carry it to the world, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Ray Meadows is a PhD student at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He has previously served as pastor of an inner city church plant in upstate New York and a Church and Community Missions, Missionary with the North American Mission Board. He currently serves as Director of Information Systems at Mid-America and is married with three children.
“Someone has said everyone is born an original and dies a copy. That wasn’t true of Vance Havner. Vance Havner was born an original and he died an original.”

Next to Billy Graham, Vance Havner is arguably the most notable Southern Baptist Evangelist of the twentieth century. Havner died on August 12, 1986, at the age of eighty-four. The keynote speaker at Havner’s funeral service was Billy Graham. He stated, “Someone has said everyone is born an original and dies a copy. That wasn’t true of Vance Havner. Vance Havner was born an original and he died an original.”

Havner’s body is buried in the New Friends Cemetery in Greensboro, North Carolina, along side the body of his wife, Sara. In addition to his name, there are four other words engraved on his tombstone: Evangelist, Preacher, Revivalist, Author. Those four words provide an adequate summary of his life and ministry.

Vance was born on October 17, 1901, in Jugtown, North Carolina, a small pottery-making community in Catawba County. His father, Pinkney Havner, was a godly Christian gentleman who spent his entire life in a rural environment. He had learned simple country values from his parents, and he transmitted these same values to his own children. He provided for his family a simple, godly home environment. When describing his childhood home Vance Havner declared, “There were no rugs, no upholstered chairs, absolutely no modern conveniences. But in it and around it were all those simple and blessed things that made up the life of a country boy in that era just before progress got into high gear.”

Pinkney Havner had felt called to be a preacher as a
young person, but never followed through on that call. Some accused him of calling his son Vance to preach, but Vance made it clear that his father had not done that. He said, “Father should have been a preacher—two of his brothers were ministers—and he sort of lived again in me. But he did not make a preacher of me, as he was accused of doing.” Vance Havner’s father, however, was delighted that his son had been called to be a preacher. A lesser man might have expressed jealousy or even resentment toward his son, but not Pinkney Havner. He regarded it as the highest joy of his life.

The influence of Vance’s father on his life was immeasurable. He never forgot, even as an elderly man, his father’s influence. The human investment that Pinkney Havner made in his son was a theme for much of his son’s later preaching. It was unquestionably the most significant influence that he experienced.

Havner’s mother also had a meaningful influence in his life. She would not fit in with modern feminism. She felt no need to be liberated. She exercised her freedom in Christ by being a Christian wife and mother. She was a modest, quiet woman who was content to be a homemaker. Havner was a lot like his mother. He was a reserved and shy man. He attributed his shyness to his mother. He declared, “I inherited some of mother’s reticence although I’ve been before the public all my life. I am glad that while I followed Father in my love of preaching, it was balanced with my mother’s shyness, else I might have talked myself to death.”

In addition to his parents, Havner was also impressed by preachers. His childhood home was always the place of lodging for visiting preachers that came to preach at his home church. His father always let him stay up late at night when the visiting preachers were in the home so that he could see their genuineness and feel their hearts. Sitting up late at night, listening to his father discuss the things of God with those visiting preachers was counted by Havner as his greatest childhood privilege. Only Heaven will reveal the full impact of those late night discussions in the life of Havner.

Vance Havner was also influenced by his love of nature, which was a lifelong affair. It began with bird watching as a boy, but it continued throughout his entire life. He loved the mountains, the snow, the rain, the sunshine, flowers of all kinds, trees, and even bugs. Much of his preaching and writing was inspired by things of nature. He was fascinated
by all that nature had to offer, but it was his love for birds that remained his first love in the world of nature. In one of the many newspaper articles he wrote for The Charlotte Observer, he penned these words: "Last week’s hermit thrush sang ever so softly down in a little ravine near the house. I was preparing a speech for a Rotarian banquet, but when hermit thrushes are singing speeches can wait, so I abandoned my outlines and attended the concert."

As a boy Havner did not have a television to steal away his time. Instead he gave time to reading books. Those which greatly influenced his life were John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, and such classics as Little Women and Through the Looking Glass. The book that he read the most and the one which had the greatest impact on his life was the Bible. Reflecting on his time spent studying the Bible as a youth, he stated, “For this generation, brought up on movie thrillers and silly comics, I covet a childhood nurtured on the Word of God. It might seem the depth of boredom to a modern youngster fed up on trash and jaded on worn-out excitement, but life was happier before the “Amen” age gave way to the era of 'So What.'"

Vance Havner was saved as a child. He accepted Christ alone in the woods when he was ten years old. His conversion happened during the time of the annual revival meeting in his home church in which several preachers preached. But he did not attribute his conversion to a sermon. He said later, “My father’s concern, my own reflections, the revival atmosphere—through all these the Spirit spoke. Alone in the woods below our house I knelt one afternoon and took Christ as my Savior."

Even before his salvation Havner knew he was going to be a preacher and he received a divine call to preach. In his eighties he said, “I was not a prophet by profession, nor the son of a prophet by parentage, but a prophet by Providence." Throughout his ministry he stood firm in his conviction that preachers should experience a divine call.

Vance Havner began preaching at the age of eleven and preached for over seven decades. His first sermons were preached in small Sunday School classes. His first time to preach in a church service came at the age of twelve at the First Baptist Church in Hickory, North Carolina. He wore short pants and stood in a chair behind the pulpit. From that humble beginning, he grew to become
one of America’s most popular preachers. During his ministry he served as a pastor, an itinerant evangelist, and a popular conference speaker. Upon leaving the pastorate in 1940, he spent the rest of his life traveling across America proclaiming the Word of God in revival meetings, Bible conferences, and at denominational and non-denominational conventions.

Havner also was a prolific writer. He said of himself, “I never knew the day when I did not feel that I should preach and write.” He sent his first “sermon” to his small-town newspaper when he was nine years old. He later authored thirty-eight books, numerous magazine articles, and more than six hundred newspaper articles for The Charlotte Observer in Charlotte, North Carolina. His books are on the shelves of many preachers of many different denominations. His first book, “Beside the Still Waters,” was published in 1934. His best known book, Though I Walk through the Valley, published in 1974, recounts the illness and death of his wife Sara and his reactions to those experiences.

It was actually his writing ministry that opened up doors for Havner to become a popular conference speaker. After he wrote his first book, he received numerous opportunities to write in periodicals. One of those periodicals was “Revelation,” edited by the famous preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse. From that one periodical came the opportunity to preach at such conferences as Founder’s Week at Moody Bible Institute, Winona Lake, Keswick Conventions, and R.A. Torrey Conferences on the West Coast.

Havner never played the political church game to open doors for his ministry. He believed that God was big enough to open any doors that should be opened. He was dependent on the Lord for the new itinerant ministry to which he knew God was calling him. It was the opening of so many doors to preach elsewhere that caused him to resign as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1940. The itinerant ministry kept him on the road for forty-four years until his death.

Though he preached in many evangelical circles, Vance Havner was a lifelong Southern Baptist. Southern Baptists are better people because of the ministry of Vance Havner. Few preachers of the twentieth century appeared in more state and national conferences or conventions than did Havner. Many churches and preachers experienced real revival under his ministry. Havner saw his ministry as that of a New Testament prophet. He declared, “My ministry is
revival rather than evangelism, but the term ‘revivalist’ has never appealed to me. The most neglected ministry today is that of the New Testament prophet."

That was the ministry of Vance Havner. He was a New Testament prophet. His preaching called people away from sin and back to God. He proclaimed the unpopular message of repentance. This was a theme from which he never backed away and for which he never apologized. Havner understood that the role of the prophet was not always a popular one. He knew that the modern religious persuasions were antagonistic to the prophet’s voice. He was aware of the loneliness that could accompany the ministry of the prophet. However, Havner remained true to his God and faithful to his calling.

There was a brief period in Havner’s life during his early twenties that he became enamored with liberalism. Even though he later abandoned liberalism completely, he never forgot its effect on his life and ministry. There were several reasons for his brief theological drift. First, World War One had ended, and dreams of a man-made utopia filled the minds of many. Second, old-fashioned ways were being rejected and even ridiculed by multitudes. Third, and most significant, was a radio preacher who had captured the hearts of many in the religious world. His name was Harry Emerson Fosdick, a noted theological liberal. Havner described his ministry during this period in his life with these terms:

I began to preach this "new light." It brought no conviction of sin, but instead it smoothed consciences and gave the impression that man was more weak than wicked and needed culture rather than Calvary. I congratulated myself on the increased attendance at church, supposing it indicated progress as a preacher. But while many complimented me, there were no conversions."

After a year in the grip of liberalism, Havner resigned as pastor of his first church, the Salem Baptist Church of Weeksville, North Carolina. He returned back to his home place feeling like he had failed both his Heavenly Father and his earthly one. The young man who had started out with such popularity and fanfare was now out of the ministry. The coming winter months added even more heartache to Havner. His father died that winter, and Havner helped his mother operate the family grocery store. One
night the store was robbed and burned, and that was a turning point in Havner’s life. He said, “The Lord made it clear to my heart that if I would preach the old message I had preached as a boy, He would make a way for me.”

It was at that time that Havner began reading J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* out in the woods. God greatly used that book to draw Havner back to the old message. After returning to his theological roots, he returned to Salem Baptist Church in Weeksville, and for three years preached the truth of the Bible. He wrote, “I studied my Bible, tramped the country roads, and laid a good foundation for the years to come.” This approach is not a bad philosophy for modern day preachers.

When you think of Vance Havner, you know that first and foremost he was a preacher. Though he possessed gifted writing skills, he was in his element when standing behind a pulpit proclaiming the Word of God. It was his preaching that made much of his writing so penetrating. Billy Graham said of Havner, “He is one of the few people who can translate his preaching into writing, so that his writing has the same power, spark, fire, enthusiasm, and conviction that his preaching does.”

As a boy preacher, Havner built his sermons around two major themes, namely the Books of the Bible and the periods of Bible History. Later, he developed a series of messages on the life of Christ. Then, as a teenage preacher boy, he began preaching on Old and New Testament characters. In his teen years, one of his lifelong themes began to appear. He observed that the churches were not practicing what he understood to be New Testament Christianity. He was not afraid to expose sin in the church. This was characteristic of his ministry throughout his life.

It would be a mistake to pass off Havner’s boldness as simply the brashness of youth. This boldness never departed from his preaching style. Though, in later years he did mix enough humor to make his preaching more palatable, he did not lose his strong convictions and his sermons did not lose their sting. Havner’s boldness was tempered by his gentleness. He never compromised his convictions, but he did demonstrate great affection for the saints he sought to stir up. He never raised his voice while preaching, but he always raised the spiritual temperature in every room in which he preached. He read every word he preached from a manuscript,
but he never lost the attention of his hearers. His compassion and humor, mixed with Biblical fire, held his hearers attention—they clung to every word. These were the traits that caused his itinerant ministry to sky-rocket after leaving the pastorate.

Vance Havner’s life and ministry were greatly influenced by his beloved wife, Sara. It was after he had begun his itinerant ministry that he met her. In 1940 he was speaking at the Florida Bible Institute when he became ill. A young lady, Sara Allred, brought soup to his room, leaving it at the door and hurrying away before he could open it. From that a love relationship began that led them to marriage. When Havner married Sara he was thirty-nine years old. He quipped, “I was nearly forty before I got married and sixty-six before I ever bought a car. I wanted to think it over.”

Vance and Sara traveled together in his itinerant ministry for over thirty-three years. Havner never learned to drive, so Sara would drive while Havner rode beside her.

In 1973, Sara contracted Cushing’s disease and she died on September 2 of that same year. She died at 2:15 on Sunday morning, and at eleven that same morning Havner preached a sermon in which he stated, “I haven’t lost her because I know where she is. You haven’t lost anything when you know where it is. Death can hide but not divide. Thou art with Christ, and Christ with me. We’re united still in Christ.”

Vance Havner was unique in his preaching style. He possessed no solitary method for the selection of a text for a sermon. Sometimes the text came from devotional reading or daily activity. Sometimes the text came from the words of a song, a line in a book, or from the observation of nature. There were times when he preached without a text at all. Even then, however, his content was biblical.

Havner felt that the man of God must spend time with God if a sermon is to spring forth from a text. He knew that lack of spiritual preparation could not be replaced by any other ministerial activity. He felt that a sermon was not a preaching of man, but a message from God. He believed that God’s face, God’s favor, and God’s will must be sought, found, and revealed in the sermon. He understood that the sermon had to come from the preacher’s heart as well as from the preacher’s head. Just as the mind should be filled with facts, the heart should be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit. That was not merely a precept for Havner, it was his lifestyle.
Vance believed in the Person of the Holy Spirit and strongly asserted his belief in the need for being filled with the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. He was distressed that the filling of the Holy Spirit had become so much of a debate in his lifetime. Referring to that debate, he declared, “Being filled with the Spirit has become more a matter of argument than experience. Whatever it is, most Christians don’t have it. We are so afraid of getting out on a limb that we don’t even get up the tree.”

Havner believed that every Christian’s life needed fire, and that fire came from the Holy Spirit. He felt that it was tragic that so many Christians lived beneath their privilege. The Holy Spirit lives within the child of God to comfort, encourage, equip, empower, enable, and convict. He teaches the believer the Word of God, guides him into all truth, and provides guidance in every walk of life. This was what Havner believed and proclaimed. He was also unwilling to deny the experience of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life because of a debate over semantics. He felt it was foolish to miss the blessing over a debate about terminology.

Meditation and contemplation were very important to Havner in the building of a sermon, but it would be wrong to conclude that he depended on these alone. Even the most casual reader of his sermons detects that he spent a great amount of time reading. He was always intellectually prepared, but he made it clear that no amount of intellectual preparation could suffice for the lack of spiritual preparation. Time in the pulpit must be preceded by time in the prayer closet.

Vance Havner was an original when it came to sermon structure. Though he spent most of his life structuring sermons, he did not follow a set pattern. Some of his sermons were expository in nature, but most would be characterized as textual or topical. At times he had three points, at times seven, and at times only one. In some sermons he used alliteration extensively. In other messages alliteration was completely ignored.

His sermon structure was predicated on sticking to the point. He was not prone to wander far from his text nor from his subject. Basically, Havner stressed one major point in his sermon structure and then applied that point in several different ways. He discovered what the Scripture said and stuck with it. He chose words, developed outlines, and included illustrations with that purpose in mind. Most of Havner’s sermons were structured in such
a way as to be relevant to both Christian and non-Christian hearers. Though he devoted much of his preaching to the areas of revival and discipleship, he never forgot the power of the Gospel in the conversion of the unbeliever.

Havner’s sermons were highly illustrated and many of his illustrations came from Scripture. He delighted in using Old Testament characters to illustrate New Testament truths. Also, many of his illustrations came from his rural upbringing. People he had met provided him with numerous opportunities to cast light on a sermonic point. In a sermon reflecting on the death of his wife entitled, “Things I’ve Learned in the Dark,” he provided this illustration:

In my first little country pastorate there was a dear man whose wife had committed suicide. It nearly killed him. I visited him after he had gotten himself fairly well in hand, and we sat together discussing trouble in general. On top of the loss of his wife, his only child had drowned some months later. Looked like he had more than his portion. And then we got on the subject of sleeplessness, and he said, "Well, I’ve learned one thing. When time comes to go to bed, I go in my room and I close the door."

Now he didn’t mean the door to the room there. He closed the door on all the tragedy and all that sorrow, forgetting the things that are behind.

Who could hear that illustration and forget it? Who could forget the truth that it represented? The ability to close the door became a major strength in Havner’s personal life and a primary theme in his later preaching.

Havner’s strongest point in preaching was his ability to make application to the hearers. He refused to see the preacher’s role as that of a historian or a dispenser of vain philosophy. To Havner, the preacher was first and foremost a prophet. As a prophet, he delivered the message of God to the people in a way they could understand. He did not speak over their heads. He aimed at their hearts. Having delivered the message, he called the hearers to privately and publicly respond.

Vance practiced what he preached. He rejected any idea that created a chasm between belief and practice. He was no hypocrite. No scandal ever followed him throughout his entire
ministry. Even his critics did not deny that he lived a moral life. His belief system made a difference in his preaching, but it made an even greater difference in his living.

Havner’s uniqueness was also seen in his sermon delivery. He delivered his sermons powerfully but without great fanfare. He did not often use gestures in his preaching. Most of the time his hands were holding on to the pulpit. When he did use gestures, they were minimal and undramatic. The most noticeable non-verbal communication came with facial expressions. He could bring comfort or conviction with just a look.

Havner preached from a manuscript every time he entered the pulpit. For him, any spontaneity came in the time of sermon preparation. While he did occasionally depart from his printed sermon, it was only momentarily. He soon returned to his prepared text. While this type of preaching does not prove to be effective for most preachers, Havner was an exception. He wrote and spoke the same way and he did both effectively. Not even the most severe critic of Havner would ever have called him boring.

The use of humor was an indication of Havner’s homiletical skill. He did not use humor for the sake of entertainment, but rather to enhance his communicative skill. Billy Graham said of Havner, “He never told a joke just for a joke’s sake, but always used his humor to put across spiritual truths.” Because of his gift of humor, Havner was often referred to as the Will Rogers of the American pulpit.

The readers of Havner’s books will not have to look long before seeing his humor revealed. Humor can be found on almost every page. Sometimes it was what David Larson called “sanctified sarcasm,” but it was part of Havner’s appeal that endeared him to so many.

Perhaps the most remembered thing about Vance Havner was his ability to turn a phrase. He was a master of the English language and he used it powerfully. He did not use language to impress the intellectual. He used it to communicate the truth of Scripture. He became so adept at turning a phrase that a term was coined to describe his ability in this area. That term was “Havnerism.” Adrian Rogers, long time pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN, was a fan of Vance Havner. Rogers, who also was a master of turning a phrase, and whose many sayings appear in a book entitled “Adrianisms,” stated that his own preaching style had been greatly influenced by “Havnerisms.” He declared, “I
have said so many things that Vance Havner said that I almost think they are my own. I often find paragraphs or thoughts in my own thinking that were imbedded there by reading Vance Havner.”

Let me conclude this brief sketch of the life and ministry of Vance Havner with a personal testimony. I can truly say that no other man has ever had a greater impact on my life than Havner. God called me to be a Baptist preacher in 1963, when I was sixteen years old. Upon graduating from high school I enrolled in a Baptist university in my home state. While there, I was exposed to liberalism for the first time in my life. Higher textual criticism, along with its JEPD theories, was taught as fact. I began to soak up liberal theology and even bought a set of “The Interpreter’s Bible,” a very liberal set of commentaries.

The power of God that I had known as a teenage preacher boy departed from my life, but I thought it to be just a phase. After all, I was a Baptist preacher in a Baptist university, so I thought everything would turn out all right. During that time I was given a book by Vance Havner, “Living in Kingdom Come.” In that book he gave his testimony of the effects liberalism had on his life and ministry and how God brought him out of it. One night as I read that book in my dormitory room, I fell on my knees and asked God to forgive me for my theological drift and to fill me with His Holy Spirit. God did both of those things that night and I have never been the same.

That was not the end of Havner’s influence on my life. For thirty-three years I was a pastor in Southern Baptist churches. My last pastorate was at the Kirby Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, where I served for almost twenty years. It is one of the great churches in this denomination. As my outside preaching ministry began to grow beyond my wildest expectations, I remembered the testimony of Vance Havner concerning his departure from the pastorate. I knew that God’s path for Havner was God’s path for me. I resigned from Kirby Woods and have been a wandering prophet now for almost four years. Thank God for Havner’s impact on my life.

My oldest son, Vance, is named for Vance Havner. In that way I paid tribute to this remarkable Evangelist, Preacher, Revivalist, and Author. Unfortunately, many young preachers today have never read any of Havner’s books or have even heard of him. This is a tragedy. I would encourage any serious young preacher to
find some of Havner’s books and read them to the point of almost memorization. If you do, your life and ministry will be greatly enhanced. Though none of his books are in print today, they can be found in used book stores and in the libraries of older preachers. Take the time to find them and read them. Also, many of Havner’s sermons are available today on CDs and DVDs. If you take the time to listen/watch these, they will be some of the greatest blessings to your spiritual life.

**BOOKS BY VANCE HOUSTON HAVNER**

*By the Still Waters.* New York: Revell, 1934.


**SOURCES**


Bob Pitman pastured for over 20 years at Kirby Woods Baptist in Memphis. He is now a full-time evangelist living in Muscle Shoals, AL. He holds a PhD from MABTS in Practical Theology and serves as the Dean of the Adrian Rogers Center for Biblical Preaching at MABTS. Pitman is considered by many to be one of the most effective preachers today.
One result of that failure is a generation of believers who are not well-grounded in the faith, who are subject to the winds of aberrant theology, and who have not experienced daily victory in Christ.

Maybe your story is similar to mine. I became a Christian in 1974 at the age of 13. My church loved God, believed the Word, and taught me to trust the inerrant Word of God. They faithfully taught the Word in Sunday school and from the pulpit. To this day, I am most grateful for a congregation that gave me such a foundation.

What they did not do, however, was offer an intentional strategic plan to disciple new believers. While unstated, their assumption was that members who attended Sunday school and worship would be discipled—even if almost by accident. Again, I am most thankful for what they gave me, but I longed for more. As a teenage male in a home of non-believers, I needed someone to walk beside me, teach me, and train me. I needed a disciplemaker in my life.

My story, I fear, is echoed around the world. Most North American churches have not discipled well, and I am learning that many churches around the globe struggle with the same issue. Christian churches have, it appears, failed to fully address the mandate of the Great Commission. One result of that failure is a generation of believers who are not well-grounded in the faith, who are subject to the winds of aberrant theology, and who have not experienced daily victory in Christ.

Against this backdrop of partial obedience to the Great Commission, we are reminded just how much this mandate matters to God. He loves the world (John 3:16) and is not “wishing for any to perish but
for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). It was Jesus, the One in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB Col 2:9), who uttered the Great Commission mandate (Matt. 28:16-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:45-49, John 20:19-23, Acts 1:6-8). Spoken at least four times from the lips of Jesus, this command clearly demands our full obedience.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to review the New Testament expressions of the Great Commission, focusing ultimately on the mandate to teach those who are Christ’s disciples, and illustrating why obedience to this command matters. A second goal is to offer suggestions for local church leaders who seek to lead Great Commission churches that make disciples.

**THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST**

Both the repetition and the location of the Great Commission passages imply seriousness and significance behind the commission. All four of the Gospels include some type of sending/going/proclaiming statement near the end, suggesting a climactic purpose behind the textual positioning. Acts 1:8 differs, of course, but that text serves more as a rough outline and theme verse of Luke’s second volume than it does a climax. (Polhill, 2001, 87) That difference notwithstanding, it is undeniable that near the end of His ministry and at the beginning of the church’s mission, Christ called believers to take the gospel to the nations.


But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

More than one writer has noted that these final verses of Matthew’s Gospel summarize central themes of this book, including the authority of Christ, the universality of the gospel, the necessity of discipleship,
the significance of worship and faith, and the power of the abiding presence of Christ. (Blomberg, 2008, 176-78) More specifically, He who is the fulfillment of the covenants and prophecies of the Old Testament would now be the center of a message to be carried to the ends of the earth.

In this Matthean passage, the one who spoke the commission is the one who had been given “all authority” (v. 18) to do so. In the words of Christopher Wright, “The identity and the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is the cosmic indicative on which the mission imperative stands authorized.” That is, we do the Great Commission because the living Son of God demands that we do so.

The authority of Christ expressed in Matthew 28 is not a new theme in this Gospel (see, e.g., 7:29; 10:1, 7-8; 11:27; 22:43-44; 24:35). His power to defeat the devil (4:1-11), to teach like no others (7:28-29), to calm nature (8:23-27), to forgive sin (9:1-8), and to heal the sick (9:27-31) already had been established. In what is likely a reference to the Son of Man imagery of Daniel 7:13-14, He was now the resurrected one before whom every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). The Father now had granted Him authority over all of heaven and earth. (Carson, 1984, 594) He had, and has, “the divine right, as ruler over all, to give all Christians their marching orders.” (Moreau, Corwin, McGee, 2004, 44)

A similar sense of authority, albeit described differently, is depicted in John’s Great Commission text. In this Gospel, Jesus is the one with authority to send the disciples, even as the Father had sent Him (John 20:21, cf. 17:18). Jesus had come to earth to fulfill the Father’s purpose—a purpose tied inextricably to the message of atonement that the disciples would carry to the nations. The world would need to hear that the Son is also the Savior:

Jesus saw a close identification between himself and his Father. He spoke regularly of the Father’s having sent him. He and the Father are one, and so the work that the Son did was also the work of the Father. Jesus came for the purpose of giving his life as a ransom, a means of liberating those people who were enslaved to sin. He offered himself as a substitute for them.

Moreover, he who had been the one sent was now the sender. Andreas Kostenberger, in his
study on the “sending” motif of John’s Gospel, concludes that Jesus as the sent one was to bring glory and honor to the sender, do the sender’s will by working His works and speaking His words, witness to the sender and represent Him accurately, and know the sender intimately by living in relationship with Him and following His example. Now, Jesus was the one sending, and the disciples’ “relationship to their sender, Jesus, is to reflect Jesus’ relationship with His sender, the Father.” The Word who became flesh (John 1:1-14) had the authority to require as much.

Properly teaching this foundational truth likely would change most local churches’ commitment to the Great Commission. Perhaps believers are less obedient to the Great Commission because they do not fully recognize the nature of the one who gave the command. If Christ is perceived as less than the Son of God before whom all will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10), His words lose their force; a low Christology leads to a diminished Great Commission focus. On the other hand, truly knowing the majesty and power of the Son should lead to a deep desire to proclaim His name and make disciples—and consequently, an uncompromised obedience to His Matthew 28 command. It is through the teaching of the Word—the text for both evangelism and discipleship—that we learn who this Jesus really is.

**THE COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES**

Matthew records that the risen Jesus met with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, thus continuing the theme of mountaintop events in Matthew’s Gospel (14:23; 15:29; 17:1; 24:3; 26:30). Jesus’ mandate to them was clear: “go and make disciples of all nations.” The imperative—the command—in the text is “make disciples” rather than “go.” “Go” is better translated as the participial phrase, “As you are going” or “having gone,” suggesting that the disciples were to make disciples wherever they were, in any context and with any people.

That is not to say, however, that “go” loses its imperatival force or international focus in this case. D.A. Carson’s analysis is helpful here. Not only does a participle used in this fashion often function as a command, but “in a context that demands that this ministry extend to ‘all nations,’ it is difficult to believe that ‘go’ has lost all imperatival force.” In Wright’s words, “they [the disciples] will have to go to the nations as a necessary
condition of obeying the primary command” to make disciples. The disciples were not to wait for non-believers to come to them; rather, they were to take the initiative to evangelize. Such evangelism would model the heart of God, whose Son came to His own, became flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:11, 14). He who died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8) demanded that His followers take that good news to the ends of the earth. Through that ministry, believers from the corners of the globe would enter the kingdom (Matt. 8:11).

The task is not finished with evangelizing, however. Indeed, the entire, non-negotiable process of making disciples includes leading a non-believer to trust in Christ and repent from sin, followed by directing that new Christian in the lifelong task of walking with Christ in obedience. The former is marked by baptism (v. 19), and the latter is accomplished through teaching (v. 19).

The goal is that those who follow Christ will live like Christ and lead others to do the same. Believers are to be “learners commanded to produce more learners.” Perhaps the words of Kostenberger and O’Brien most poignantly capture the thought here: “the present charge [Matt. 28:20] makes clear that mission entails the nurturing of converts into the full obedience of faith, not merely the proclamation of the gospel.” (Kostenberger, Obrien, 2001, 105)

Hence, a process of making disciples that ends with only the conversion of the evangelized is incomplete at best, disobedient at worst. In fact, the results of this omission can be disastrous. Untaught believers are ill-equipped to face trials, untrained to recognize false teachings, and unprepared to teach others. They quickly become easy prey for an enemy who seeks to devour them (1 Pet. 5:8).

Here, the contemporary church faces at least four issues. First, most local churches are doing neither evangelism nor discipleship strategically. For example, an increasingly lower number of baptisms in Southern Baptist churches at least implies that we are not evangelizing nor raising up believers committed to evangelism. Carrying out both components of the Great Commission is biblically required, but doing both begins with doing at least one of the two. The inherent struggle with balancing evangelism and discipleship is non-existent if neither is occurring in the first place.

Second, where evangelizing is taking place, follow-up discipleship often is neglected.
Baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit may be occurring, but teaching to follow all that Jesus commanded somehow gets lost in the process. The result is now multi-generational spiritual weakness: undisciplined believers are serving as leaders in our churches, and they are doing little to disciple the newest believers. Great Commission obedience seldom is found in believers who should be eating the meat of God’s Word, but who are still feeding on the milk (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-3, Heb. 5:12).

Third, young pastors seeking to correct this problem must be aware of the danger of emphasizing discipleship to the neglect of evangelism. Clearly, the problem must be addressed, but teaching and training alone produce a classroom more than a New Testament church. Genuine discipleship turns out believers committed to doing everything Jesus commanded—including evangelism.

Fourth, churches and mission agencies must recognize that “making disciples” is a global responsibility. The Matthew 28 call is to make disciples “of all nations,” a phrase best understood as “all the people groups” rather than, as some suggest, “Gentiles” or “countries.” (Piper, 2010, 210-11) Among all people groups throughout the world, Christians are to reach non-believers and then teach believers to obey all that Jesus commanded. Anything less fails to fulfill the Great Commission and weakens the church’s effectiveness around the world.

**THE CENTRALITY OF PROCLAMATION AND TEACHING**

The Gospel of Luke ends with this challenging directive:

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

After having surprised two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, Jesus taught them about Himself as revealed in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms; that is, He taught them that the Old
Testament is itself a book about Him. As one writer has summarized, “The Old Testament—they would see now with the new light cast upon it—showed the necessity of an atoning Redeemer, from the sin which it everywhere reveals, and of a dying Redeemer, from the death which it proclaims as the consequence.”

He who opened their eyes to Him (Luke 24:31) also opened their minds (v. 45) to understand the Scriptures He explained (or “opened”) to them (v. 32). Jesus led them to understand that the Old Testament speaks of his suffering and resurrection (see, e.g., Ps. 22, Isa. 53) and to see His story in those writings. He likely taught them that the message of calling the nations to Him is a clarion call in that same testament (e.g., Ps. 67; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Acts 26:22–23).

Verse 47 best states Luke’s understanding of the Great Commission: “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” The reader likely will recognize that Luke’s expression is similar to the debatable passage in Mark (“preach the gospel to all creation”) and to the thematic verse of Acts 1:8 (“you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem”). Though not directly addressing the Lukan passage, William Hendrickson’s understanding of John 17:18, 20:21 ties the Johannine Great Commission text to Luke as well:

The two comparisons [between the Father’s sending the Son, and the Son’s sending the disciples] blend into one idea, which is this: just as the Father has sent Jesus into the world with a message, so also Jesus has sent the disciples into the world with a message.

Without question, proclamation—that is, verbally speaking the message—is essential to doing the Great Commission. That should not be surprising, if indeed one believes Romans 10:14—“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” Apart from hearing the gospel, no person in any people group of the world can be saved; thus, proclaiming the Word is imperative. As Piper has rightly noted, “The frontline of missions is the preaching of the Word of God, the gospel.”

At the same time, the combination of repentance and forgiveness—common in the Luke/Acts volumes (see Luke 24:47;
Acts 5:31, 8:22)—undoubtedly shows that forgiveness does not come apart from repentance. The disciples were to echo John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2, Mark 1:4) and Jesus himself (Matt. 4:17) in demanding repentance even as they proclaimed forgiveness. The contemporary church that has been so reticent to demand repentance would be wise to take note of this mandate again. Preaching without a call to repent is not Great Commission preaching.

The disciples were also “witnesses” (here and in Acts 1:8 are those individuals who are understood to have seen the events described and could testify to them), and their witness added credibility to their message. In the sermonic words of the preacher Warren Wiersbe, the disciples were to be, “both preachers (heralds of a message) and witnesses ( sharers of an experience) of what the Lord had done for them and said to them.” (Wiersbe, 1997, 206) This they were to do in the power and authority of His name, and this they did throughout the Book of Acts (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10, 12, 17–18, 30; 5:28, 40; 8:12, 16; 9:27–28; 10:43, 48; 16:18; 19:5). In the name of Jesus souls would be saved and disciples made.

Again, however, the followers of Christ were not to omit the necessary teaching that followed conversion (Matt. 28:20). They were to teach believers to obey what Jesus taught, thus helping to assure that future generations heard the gospel and saw it demonstrated in holy lives. New Testament scholar, Robert Plummer, described this responsibility of the church as follows: “The apostles are to teach the converts everything that Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:20). If the young converts are to become mature disciples, they must continue to be schooled in the apostles’ teaching—enabled by Christ’s indwelling Spirit to love both God and their neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).” So clearly is this task described in the scriptures that Carson has concluded, “The NT can scarcely conceive of a disciple who is not baptized or is not instructed.”

At least three challenges for the local church come to mind. First, church leaders honestly must consider how clearly and recurrently we proclaim the good news of Jesus. In some cases, messages address needs, but not our greatest need: the need for a forgiving Savior. In other cases, preaching is so dominated by what we stand against that the lost world never fully hears the Good News. Neither sermon is a Great Commission sermon; the former never gets to the real problem, and the latter never gets to the answer.
Second, young preachers increasingly interested in social justice and New Testament social ministry (and rightly so) must remember that it is the Word of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:18). We older leaders who wrongly backed away from social ministry for fear of losing our evangelistic focus have much to learn from the younger generation here—but all of us must fight to keep primary the proclamation of the gospel. Much more common than a return to gospel-centered preaching is a subtle slide away from it.

Third, churches must develop an intentional, systematic means of teaching believers to know and obey the Word. This task is not easy, nor is it optional. Like the expectant parents who get ready for a new family addition, the local church must be prepared to feed, nourish, and guide new believers under their care. The church must teach, realizing that, “discipleship arises from teaching and becomes permanent through teaching.”

In fact, the next section of this article will show one of the dangers associated with the church not fulfilling this mandate. To that discussion this article now turns.

**THE ATTACKS OF THE ENEMY**

Why then must we teach believers? The most basic response and to be clear, the only needed one is that Jesus commanded us to do so. A second response is, though, no less true: a very real enemy seeks to destroy followers of Christ, and teaching them is a primary means to prepare for the battle.

Scripture strongly affirms that Satan attacks persons who become believers. For example, Jesus warned Peter that Satan demanded permission to “sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter himself later warned believers, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The apostle Paul, who himself experienced “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7), likewise admonished believers to “put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). James, too, called believers to resist the devil, presupposing that the enemy would attack (Jas. 4:7). If Satan does not attack believers, such recurrent warnings would seem irrelevant and unnecessary.

Though the enemy’s schemes against believers are many, some are obvious. Satan
entices believers with temptation, seeking to lure them into patterns of their former walk (Eph. 4:17-32). After influencing believers to sin, he then heaps accusations on them; the tempter quickly becomes the accuser (Rev. 12:10). His strategy—to “beat up on sinners” who fail to comprehend the meaning of real grace (Moreau, 1997, 85)—often leads to a cycle of defeat and discouragement. As a result, ineffective, defeated believers carry little influence with non-believers who are held in the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13).

Moreover, Satan endeavors to cultivate strife among believers, thereby weakening the church’s united witness (see John 17:20-21). The challenge of world evangelization is so immense that God-centered, Bible-believing Christians must work together to accomplish their task. The enemy, however, will do all he can to sow seeds of discord among believers. In the words of the Puritan William Gurnall, “we by our mutual strifes give the devil a staff to beat us with; he cannot well work without fire, and therefore blows up these coals of contention.” Divided believers offer little hope to an already fractured world.

Lewis Sperry Chafer likewise helps us understand Satan’s purposes for attacking believers: The believer is also the object of Satanic attack because of the fact that unto the child of God is committed the great ministry of reconciliation; that by his testimony both in life and word, and by his prayers, the facts of redemption may be given to the world. If Satan can cripple the believer’s service he accomplishes much in resisting the present purpose of God. No other explanation is adequate for the dark pages of church history, the appalling failure of the church in world-wide evangelism, or her present sectarian divisions and selfish indifference.

Chafer’s conclusion that “no other explanation” (other than satanic attack) adequately explains the church’s failures is perhaps overstated, but his point remains valid. Satan attacks believers to weaken their testimony in life and word—and one result of their falling is an “appalling failure of the church in world-wide evangelism.”

For this reason, the enemy most carefully aims his arrows at believers whose lives are God-honoring and Great Commission-oriented. Charles Spurgeon himself an evangelist
extraordinaire described this reality with these words: “The nearer you live to God, the more you can expect Satan’s opposition. There is sure to be contention wherever the harvest is plenteous and where the farmer’s toil is well rewarded.”

Given the reality of Satanic attack on Great Commission believers, the church must prepare its members for the conflict. Evangelism itself invites a response from the enemy, and the evangelist who is improperly armed will likely suffer spiritual defeat. The fire of evangelistic passion will thus be quenched. It is here that the necessity of discipleship and teaching as preparation for the battle becomes obvious.

**THE ARMOR OF GOD**

Clinton Arnold, in his book *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*, states that the Book of Ephesians includes proportionately more “power terminology” than any other New Testament book. (Arnold, 1997, 1) He further contends that the emphasis on the “powers” reflects a prevalent interest in religious powers in western Asia Minor in the first century. Believers in that region needed “encouragement in their ongoing struggles with these pernicious spirit-forces,” and the letter of Ephesians provided that encouragement and instruction.

That letter, a writing neatly divided between theological teaching (chs. 1-3) and practical application (chs. 4-6), ends with an armor/warfare passage (Eph. 6:10-17) that serves as a peroratio to the book; that is, it “sums up some of the broad themes of the letter in effective fashion under new imagery.” Additionally, the peroration not only summarizes the book, but it does so in a way that would have encouraged the hearers to act on what they had heard. Hence, Paul not only warned the hearers about the conflict, but also called them to fight the battle by wearing the armor of God.

On one hand, the armor is God’s armor (Eph. 6:11): it is the believer’s position in Christ that provides the protection of salvation, righteousness, and truth. On the other hand, Paul’s admonition also assumes that the weapons must be exercised. Putting on the armor involves accepting one’s identity in Christ and then living obediently out of that identity. To illustrate, Gurnall argued that the breastplate of righteousness is both passively applied and actively exercised; the believer is passive in the production of this righteousness, but he is “afterward active, and co-working with the Spirit in all actions of holiness.”

How, then, does “putting on
the armor” relate to the Great Commission? The essence of putting on the armor is living daily in truth, righteousness, faith, and hope, while always being ready to proclaim the gospel of peace found in the Word. Only through the teaching of the Word can believers learn how to accomplish these goals. Moreover, daily putting on and utilizing the armor is an essential element of the believer’s process of becoming like Jesus—the goal of biblical discipleship.

Putting on the armor includes developing character, meeting ethical demands, exhibiting personal holiness, preparing for witnessing, studying the Bible, and focusing on prayer. This process is not about mystical prayer that magically applies the weaponry to believers’ lives each day. Rather, it is about discipleship and spiritual growth that affect all of one’s life. Wearing the armor is about daily living as a follower of Christ—and it is teaching that shows believers how to live that way.

An effective Great Commission strategy, therefore, must include an uncompromising commitment to discipleship for both the evangelist and the new convert. The evangelist who has not been discipled will be unprepared for the attacks that come as he strikes against the kingdom of darkness. He will battle for only so long before the enemy hits him at an unarmed vulnerability. Likewise, the new believer who is not discipled will not be ready for such attacks as doubt, temptation, and discouragement. This newborn believer will, in fact, be a babe in Christ sent into the battle unarmed. Defeat is almost inevitable unless the church fulfills its task of making disciples through teaching (Matt. 28:18-20).

In my role as Vice President for Global Theological Advancement at the International Mission Board, my responsibilities include promoting discipleship and theological training on the international mission field. Our Southern Baptist seminaries and many local churches have been valuable allies in this task, but the work is far from complete. We need more partners who will assist us in training national believers who will then teach the next generations in their own people groups. We need believers wearing the armor of God to teach others to do the same. Commitment to the entirety of the Great Commission demands nothing less.

**CONCLUSION**

The numbers are staggering. According to the Joshua
Project, 2.8 billion people make up the unreached people groups of the world. More than 41 percent of the world’s people groups remain unreached. In North America, a 2010 Barna study concluded that approximately 100 million Americans had not attended any church activities, including services, within the previous six months. Who will help to address this lostness through evangelism? And who will be ready to teach others should God grant revival? Can believers make a genuine difference in this darkness?

We can indeed, for we do this work in God’s power and under God’s promise. To be certain, God is drawing to himself a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue (Rev. 5:9, 7:9). Armed with that truth, and knowing that our responsibility is to teach those whom God saves, let us press on with the task.

**SOURCES**


D. A. Carson, Matthew, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (electronic ed.) Logos Library System (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 594. Carson argues that the authority granted here was not an increase in authority, but rather an enlargement of the spheres of authority.

A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, Gary B. McGee, Introducing World Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 44.


Chuck Lawless is Vice-President for Global Theological Advance of the International Mission Board. He formerly served as dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. The author of several books, including *Spiritual Warfare: Biblical Truth for Victory, Discipled Warriors, and Mentor*, Dr. Lawless has a strong interest in discipleship and mentoring. He and his wife, Pam, have been married for more than 20 years.

*Review by Ken Lewis*

Church planting has become a missionary emphasis for evangelical churches and denominations in North America. Mission-minded organizations are seeking to plant churches as a strategy to impact lostness in unreached parts of North America. This emphasis in church planting has resulted in a burgeoning interest in it as a discipline.

The interest in the discipline of church planting has influenced a number of strategists and practitioners to produce published works on the subject. Most of these works, however, focus on church planting in urban and suburban contexts. The predominance of attention to these areas in church planting has caused the rural context to be overlooked. The rural areas in North America represent a significant segment of the North American population and, thus, deserve attention in church planting strategies and practice. A more holistic church planting discipline calls for strategists and practitioners who will address the uniqueness of the rural context. Garner stated that his goal for this book was to, “move the discussion to church planting in rural venues” (7). Garner intended to achieve his goal by providing a “discussion on which good strategy and effective church planting is based” (7).

The book is a compilation of essays by various authors with Garner as the editor. Many of the contributing authors have varying experiences in planting or serving churches in rural contexts. The first unit of the book established the vision for church planting in rural North America. The purpose for adding rural contexts to the discipline of church planting is to leverage the principles and practices that are being effectively used in other contexts. The key evangelistic purpose is to reach people in every context with the gospel. People who live in rural areas matter to God and must be included in evangelistic outreach. Church planting, similar to the other contexts, is the most effective way to reach lost people. Garner stated that “the less densely regions and the assumed over-churched rural areas still must be reached if we are to fully embrace the mandates of the Great Commission” (11).

The second unit discussed effective strategies for planting churches in rural areas. Garner stated that an effective church planting strategy “will flow
naturally out of sound missiology” (50). The chapters in this unit reflected the strategies of rural missionaries who exegeted their respective cultures and developed an effective strategy to reach the people. This unit also contained chapters written by field practitioners who devised and implemented a church planting strategy through an association or state convention. The experiences of those who contributed varied according to their context. Many of the principles mentioned by these practitioners such as prayer, visiting, evangelism, discipleship, and vision casting were common across contexts. Some principles were unique to their context such as engaging lay leadership (120-6) and meeting in appropriate buildings that the people recognize and respect (139).

The third unit put forth some models of principles and best practices observed through various “geographical and affinity settings” (170). The authors in these chapters were church planters who applied their church planting experiences in writing their respective chapters. The geographical and cultural settings that were discussed in this unit were varied which gave the reader a broad perspective from the diversity of contexts.

The fourth unit dealt with some general topics related to rural church planting. J.D. Payne contributed a chapter where he proposed the house church model as a possible alternative for some rural contexts. Steve Wilkes wrote a chapter which discussed the spiritual preparation of a rural church leader. Joe Young authored a chapter on bivocational leadership for the rural church. Each of the previously mentioned authors used their leadership experience in the rural church in discussing their respective topic.

The book concluded with a testimonial to Dennis Hampton, the late rural missionary who was, “a champion of rural church planting and rural missiology” (246). Hampton’s testimonial serves as the model profile of the rural missionary who values the principles of relationships, contextual relevancy, simple and reproducible methods, a simple training platform, lay mobilization, and a church planting mindset (249).

The book accomplished its goal by having the discussion on rural planting and including a variety of practitioners in the discussion. However, there were times when some of the discussions were redundant, which can be expected when assimilating the input and experiences of various authors on a unified topic. The contributions of the various authors and the diversity of their contexts and experiences make this book a worthwhile read. The pastor or church planter in any context—urban, suburban, or rural—can benefit from reading this book. The reading of some of the testimonials was devotional as the authors recounted how God moved in their particular ministries. God isn’t just moving in cities. He is also working in the far-reaching parts of our continent and throughout the world. The harvest that is being reaped in rural areas attests that, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34b).
“Have you ever wondered if what we’re doing is really helping?” This is the question that was the genesis of *When Helping Hurts*. The authors, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, are both economics professors at Covenant College, which is located in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. One of their fields of interest is what the Bible teaches about poverty, as well as the way in which Christians effectively can minister to those who are financially destitute.

The authors divided their study into three segments. The first part focuses on “Foundational Concepts for Helping Without Hurting.” In this section, Corbett and Fikkert considered the reasons why poverty exists as well as the reason why Jesus came to earth. Part two, “General Principles for Helping Without Hurting,” focuses on whether relief, rehabilitation, or development is an appropriate response to poverty. Finally in part three, “Practical Strategies for Helping Without Hurting,” the authors provide practical advice on how to minister to the economically hurting in both domestic and international contexts.

*When Helping Hurts* is a timely book for a number of reasons. First, twenty-first century believers have realized anew that social justice truly is an important biblical concept. Because of a fear of watering down the gospel or being termed theologically liberal, some evangelicals have shied away from social issues. A proper contextual reading of the Bible, however, demonstrates that Jesus was compassionate to the poor and needy, and that Christianity offers real solutions for those who are suffering.

Second, not every response to poverty is equally effective. For example, Fikkert explained that on one mission trip he encountered a witch doctor who had become a committed Christian. When she became desperately sick, Fikkert quickly bought the inexpensive (by American standards) penicillin that counteracted her infection. Only later did he realize that he had approached the dilemma in the wrong way. Instead of teaching fellow believers in the region to minister to those in need around them, he provided a “quick fix” to the problem that had no lasting results—he would not be there to purchase medicine the next time that a believer became sick. In other words, Fikkert explained that throwing money at a situation easily can lead to dependency, and this harms, rather than helps, those who are poor.

Corbett and Fikkert, third, explain that non-North Americans tend to define poverty not as a lack of material items, but in terms of “shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness” (p. 53). Those who wish to minister to the poor must teach them that money is not the answer to their problem, but a relationship with Jesus provides comfort and significance. Furthermore, Jesus’ promise never to forsake His followers is not a future hope, but a present promise.

Fourth, “the health and wealth” gospel has deceived many into believing that “spiritual maturity leads to financial prosperity” (p. 70). This faulty belief
system causes those who are not financially blessed to despair, while at the same time providing a false sense of security to those who are economically independent. The authors explained that materially poor people can be a visible reminder that each person—poor or rich—is spiritually broken apart from Christ.

Finally, Corbett and Fikkert do not write from a theoretical perspective, but a practical one. Each section begins with a list of exercises to be used in small group settings. After discussing relevant biblical issues, the last page of each chapter provides reflection questions and exercises that assist the participants in adopting biblically relevant ways to address poverty that do not neglect the gospel.

In summary, When Helping Hurts is a must read for any Christian who is interested in ministering to the poor in a manner that not only addresses their economic problems, but also addresses their underlying spiritual needs. When believers become aware of those who are suffering around them, they will more effectively be able “to preach the good news of the king of God—in both word and deed—to the poor, a group that includes, in some sense, each one of us” (p. 219).


Review by James D. Noble

Because of his passion to teach young Christians how to live the Christian life in a way that reflects the life of Christ, Steve Wilkes authored Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians. Wilkes has a Doctorate of Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, where he serves as a professor in the Department of Missions.

The author came to the realization that committed Christians still have spiritual problems. In the introduction, he stated that many people may think that once they become a Christian, then all spiritual problems becomes a thing of the past (4). Therefore, Wilkes’ work is a consideration of how committed Christians can know how to navigate through life’s spiritual problems in a way that brings honor and glory to God.

After providing his definition of what a committed Christian looks like, what follows is a ten-chapter volume describing common spiritual problems of Christians. The spiritual problems included are discouragement, doubt, relationships, bitterness, spiritual warfare, lust, and fear. The remainder of the book focused on discovering our identity in Christ, the devotional life, and the key to the Christian life.

Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians can be applauded for several reasons. First, the work is a humble treatise on the personal Christian journey of the author. The author allowed the reader to know his own personal struggles throughout his life. The transparency portrayed is highly commendable. Knowing the authenticity of a person adds credibility to what they
say. In each spiritual problem mentioned, Wilkes was able to demonstrate first how he or someone he knew personally struggled. In addition, He provided the remedy to overcoming that spiritual problem.

Second, *Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians* is commended for its treatment of Scripture. In this short volume of 168 pages, there are 156 references to Scripture. Therefore, 93% of the total pages contain at least one Scripture reference. In addition, Wilkes displayed biblical accuracy, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Because of the powerful handle on Scripture, the monograph is timely and timeless.

*Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians*, third, should be praised for its literary style and content. The author’s choice of words was not superfluous. His work is concise, readable, and quite practical. Each chapter was carefully written with vivid and personal illustrations. If one is interested in learning how to deal with spiritual problems, regardless of spiritual maturity, then this work is an asset.

A fourth point worth noting is Wilkes injection of humor. Whenever one is challenged to take an introspective look at themselves, especially in spiritual matters, the change can be a bitter pill to swallow. Living the Christian life is a serious matter. However, the author was able to present the hard truth of being transformed spiritually, yet with a soft tone. For example, in the chapter explaining what it means to be a committed Christian, Wilkes stated the importance of spending quality, quiet time with God (130). To explain the point in a humorous fashion, Wilkes tells the story of how he and the love of his life were separated because they attended different colleges. The author illustrated:

In fact during the week every day we would write a letter to one another, and it just became a habit. They were not long, they were just mushy and reminded us that we genuinely loved each other and were committed to one another. At this time I was living in a boys’ dormitory named Dixon Hall. I would go to my room and take a nap or go out and play sports with the guys. Later that night I would probably remember that I had a letter from Carol, my love. So I would drag myself down to get the letter, smell of it (sometimes it smelled like perfume), and I would drag myself back to my dorm room and fall asleep for the evening. The next day I would think, “I have to write her a letter so I better read what she said.” So I would take that letter to class sometime during class. I would rip it open quietly and sit there and read the letter during the lecture. Sometimes I would finish the letter during one class, sometimes it would take me two, since they were about a page long. Now if you believe that’s the way I acted toward her letters, then I would like to interest you in some beach front property in Kansas!

Wilkes went on to explain how he would almost grab the letter from the postal worker, smell it, rip it open immediately, and read it before taking a step. He loved her! The point of the story was to laugh a truth into the reader, the truth of loving Christ and spending quiet time with Him.

In summation, *Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians* is a necessary read for all Christians. The author proved successful in his argument. He
presented the spiritual problems that Christians will face, and systematically showed how to handle them biblically.

The reviewer at times fell under conviction while reading Wilkes' work. At the end of the chapter, the reviewer paused and prayed before continuing at the time of conviction. In the reviewer's opinion, the only thing missing from the work is a directive for the reader to pray at the end of each chapter. Another suggestion would be to have a well-written prayer from the author concerning deliverance or victory over the spiritual problem for the reader to pray immediately.

Many Christians and non-Christians will be challenged as they read this work. All that apply the practical principles will be blessed richly. To God be the glory for the wisdom He invested in Steve Wilkes, birthing *Spiritual Problems of Committed Christians*. 
Subscribe to the

Journal of Evangelism and Missions

Published by Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary

☐ 3 years for $24  ☐ 2 years for $18  ☐ 1 year for $10

Name ____________________________________________

Address ____________________________________________

City ________________________________________________

State ________________ Zip ________________

Next Year’s Topic: Urban Ministry

Please make checks payable to: Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary

Detach and mail with payment to:

JEM Department
Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary
P. O. Box 2350
Cordova, TN 38088-2350