

Preparing for the Ministry

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Introduction

The purpose of this course is to help the leading men in God's Church to become more effective leaders in their congregations and to provide them with the knowledge they need to assist their Pastor in a spiritual capacity as they qualify.

The first section of the course covering Preparation for Leadership can easily be adapted and given to an entire congregation as a series of sermons prior to the selection of those men who, by their fruits, have shown they can be developed into the type of spiritual leaders God's Church is going to need in increasing numbers in the future.

This course is only an outline and suggested guide for use in a teaching situation with men the local pastor feels will develop as leaders and, possibly, into ministers in the congregation. It is by no means complete. It is an outline of basic, essential principles and knowledge a minister needs to have in order to help in become more effective in serving God's people.

What is leadership?

Some think leaders are born and not made. Others think leadership involves a particular type of personality. Some, believing they don't have the personality to become a leader, don't even try. What is the balance? Management expert John R. Sargent says:

"Philosophers, psychologists, educators, sociologists, all sorts of people have tried to see if there can be a simple definition of leadership. Actually, it appears that fifty years of study have failed to produce one personality trait or simple formula which can be used to discriminate between leaders and non-leaders. In essence, leadership is complex—it is not definable by one or a few traits, but it is definable."

In dissecting leadership into its numerous components, and analyzing each of these, we find two somewhat startling and reassuring things:

First; each of the traits or elements of leadership can be developed...

Second; practically everyone has within him some of the basic traits or elements of leadership. The real difference is the degree of development of each trait, and their proportions, one to another."

Beyer V. Parker, co-author of 'Front-line Leadership', write:

"...leadership cannot be forced or conferred upon a person—it must be earned. It can be earned by anyone with average ability who studies (the) principles of leadership and practices them continuously. The secrets of effective leadership are open to all those who study with a sincere desire to understand people and (who have) a genuine respect for the worker—his needs, feelings and dignity."

Of course, the greater the ability, the greater the individual's potential for leadership—if that individual is able to master the practices that make leaders effective.

Field-marshal Montgomery, in his book 'The Path to Leadership', writes:

"The beginning of leadership is a battle for the hearts and minds of men..."

It involves a close study of human nature; it is 'men' that are the factors of reality and importance. The greatest of all leaders known to history once said this: 'I will make you fishers of men.'

What Christ meant was that he would teach His disciples how to win the hearts of men, implying that leadership has to be taught. Some will say that leaders are born, not made, and that you can't make a leader by teaching or training. I don't agree with this entirely. ...I believe that leadership can be developed...

There are principles of leadership just as there are principles of war, and these have to be studied."

Intelligence, imagination, knowledge, insight, brilliance and personality can all add considerably to a leader's effectiveness. But they are not what make him effective. Each of these characteristics have been possessed by people who have been very ineffective as leaders. What makes a leader effective as a leader are the habits and practices that he has learned and acquired mostly by hard, systematic work.

Personality, intelligence, knowledge will normally help determine the type of leader one will be. But whether or not one will be a leader and how effective a leader will depend on how well one masters the practices and habits that, if followed, will cause even the average person to rise above those of greater ability to lead them.

It takes years of preparation to become an effective leader in God's Church. It involves hard work and requires the willingness to make any change no matter how large in order to become a more effective instrument in God's hands. Not every one can or will be a minister in this age. But many can become more effective leaders in the congregation of God's people by following the habits and practices we will be discussing.

Preparation for greater responsibility

God places an important responsibility on the leading members of His Church. If new people don't see us living God's way of life and benefiting from it, they won't buy it!

2 Corinthians 6:16,18 *"I will dwell in them and walk in them."*

What do they see and experience in us?

Are they convinced that God's way is worthwhile by what they witness in our lives? We have something fantastic to give people by showing them how God would live if He were a human being. The future success of many members depends on how much God is able to serve them through us.

Our ability to serve depends upon how much we are living God's way of life ourselves.

Luke 13:6-9 *"He came and sought fruit thereon and found none"*

Some believe that for them it is impossible to change. A few at times have mentally resigned themselves to the Great Tribulation—or even to the Lake of Fire because they feel they can't change and overcome their problems.

We are all subject to the law of inertia—resistance to change.

There is a tried and tested way that works. It involves a number of practices that must be practiced and practiced and practiced again until they become habit.

We cannot give this way of life to others until we've learned to live it ourselves.

John 15:1-2, 8 *"He purges it that it may bring forth more fruit."*

We are here because we have brought forth some fruit and show some ability to lead people. Those who have fruit can bring forth more fruit. God wants us to excel. Are these people going to see something in our lives that will convince them that God's way of life pays dividends?

What sort of quality does our way of life reflect?

Matthew 5:48 *"Become ye perfect as your Father is perfect."*

Matthew five depicts God's perfect way of life. He doesn't want to produce masters of mediocrity. Nine carat gold may look good, but it's not gold—it's not

even half gold. It doesn't fool the discerning eye and neither will we if we are not living God's way and letting Him live in us.

On Mr HWA's first trip to Lebanon he was told:

"Men like you prove God does exist."

What does the Bible say a Christian life should be like?

John 10:10 *"...that they may have life more abundantly."*

Most of us haven't really begun to live this way yet.

John 14:27 *"My peace I give to you."*

Real peace of mind should come as we become more converted—as more of God shows through.

John 15:11 *"...that your joy may be full."*

Have our lives really been full of joy? Has there been real peace of mind? For many members, the answer is "No!"

Are these only pretty platitudes? Is this false advertising? Are we making excuses for why these promises aren't being fulfilled in our lives?

Ephesians 3:20 *"...exceeding abundantly above all that we ask."*

Or, do we find God is actually doing a lot less than we ask?

Psalms 37:4-6 *"He shall give you the desires of your heart."*

He means what He says—there is a cause for every effect though. There is a way of living that will cause these things—in spite of the trials and problems we may have to experience in this life.

Matthew 11:28-30 *"...and I will give you rest."*

God offers a way of life that will bring us fulfillment and rest.

"My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Does this depict our lives? Or, do we find it a grind? Do we secretly find ourselves wishing sometimes that God had called us during the Millennium or the Great White Throne Judgement?

When we learn how to be a Christian, these promises will begin to come to pass in our lives.

What is wrong then? Why aren't the majority of God's people experiencing these promises now a lot more than they have been experiencing them? Being a Christian was meant to be exciting and fulfilling.

1) Learn to put God first

Why do some members become tired Christians? Why aren't they experiencing the abundant life, the peace of mind, the joy and fulfillment that Christ said would be the fruit of living God's way of life?

There is a cause for every effect. What is the cause for the effect that many members experience?

Matthew 22:36-38 *"...this is the first and great commandment."*

The most important part of God's way of life is to put God first. In most cases we unknowingly break this principle. It's easy to let God slip from the first place He had at baptism to second, third and even to tenth place in our lives. We may claim we are putting God first, but often we kid ourselves.

Christ said this was the first and great commandment because on it hinges spiritual growth, abundant life and the ability to inspire and serve others.

Matthew 6:33 *“Seek you FIRST the Kingdom of God.”*

‘Seek’ is present continuous tense—we must seek to put God first as a continuous thing.

God demands first place in our lives just as he demands the first tenth of our income. He commended Israel to offer up the first city (Jericho) as a burnt offering. He requires the first fruit of every tree and the first-born of every domestic animal. God demands priority and he demands that He come first—FOR OUR OWN GOOD!

How can we be sure we are putting God first in our lives?

1 Corinthians 3:9-10, 13

Our lives can be represented by a building. To make a perfect building we build it gradually—one brick at a time. We must lay each brick accurately or the finished building will not be perfect.

How can we be sure that God will have first place in the building we are constructing when everything is finished? —by making sure that as each brick goes down, He has first place.

Life is time and the building blocks of life consist of days. To build a perfect life we must build it one day at a time—carefully.

Matthew 6:11 *“Give us this day our daily bread.”*

To God, the basic unit of time is the day—there is no way that creation itself divides time into smaller units other than daylight and darkness which vary from season to season.

2 Corinthians 4:16 *“...renewed day by day.”*

The final quality of the building we are constructing in partnership with God depends on how each day is lived and ‘cemented’ in place.

One of the most important parts of the day is the preparation for that day.

Genesis 1:5 *“The evening and the morning were the first day.”*

God begins His day the previous evening. Most of us begin ours in the morning and use the following night-time period to ‘recover’ from the toil of the day. God didn’t say *“the morning and the evening...”*

The night-time at the beginning of each day was intended as preparation time for the day that was to follow. The key to putting God first in our lives depends on how we use the beginning of the day. It depends on whether or not we get to bed on time!

It has been scientifically proven that we need 7½ – 8 hours sleep per night. This badly needed preparation gets us in gear for the daylight hours that follow. It’s a vitally important part of seeking God first in our lives. Many members suffer spiritually because they lack sufficient sleep.

Next comes the equally important spiritual preparation for the day. MEN OF GOD HAVE GOTTEN UP EARLY TO STUDY GOD’S WORD AND TO HAVE MEANINGFUL CONTACT WITH GOD THROUGH PRAYER.

Psalms 119:147 Moffat: *“I am up before the dawn to pray.”*

If God is not placed first day-by-day in our lives, He won’t be first in the final outcome. God wants the first part of our day—not the leftovers, the crumbs, the wrung-out dregs of our time! It is difficult to study and pray really effectively in

the evenings as a continuous way of life. As an exception under unusual circumstances, maybe—but not as our regular habit and practice.

Psalms 5:3 *“In the morning will I direct my prayer to Thee.”*

David was a man after God’s own heart who was determined to put God first day by day. He realized God wants prime time for our own good! Many of us have been offering God the bleary-eyed evening hours when we get home from work drained of energy as the regular habit pattern of our lives.

Malachi 1:6-8 *“Ye offer the blind, the lame and the sick.”*

God doesn’t want any old time or ‘enough time’. He isn’t interested in a routine prayer life that just ‘puts in time’ yet has little meaningful contact with Him either. He wants a meaningful prayer life and by example in His Word he shows that He wants prime time.

Leviticus 22:18-22 *“Whatsoever has a blemish you shall not offer.”*

God, for our own good, doesn’t want a fatigued, tired, jaded mind that is merely going through a ceremony—a ritual of ‘putting in time’. He wants the best—a mind that is alert, rested and prepared. Sleep is designed to smooth out the mind and get rid of the ‘footprints in the sand’. Ideas implanted in the mind early in the morning will tend to last longer.

David knew when prime time was and he used it to study God’s Word and to pray.

God intended the twilight hours, when mental activity is normally at its lowest ebb, for relaxation with one’s family before retiring to get physical rest in preparation for the next day. Night-owls are generally the way they are as a result of broken laws or force of habit or both.

Mark 1:35

Christ sought God first day by day. He wasn’t going to relegate God to some other part of the day.

Decide what time you need to get to work on the morning. Count back two hours—this is when you get up. Count back another 7-8 hours—this is when you need to go to bed. Don’t let Satan and his world keep on forcing you into the nocturnal mould to prevent you giving God the first part of your day.

Psalms 119:18 *“Open my eyes...”*

Ask God to give you an understanding mind before study. Some prefer to study before they pray—others the reverse.

Daniel 6:10

Both David and Daniel prayed three times a day. Daniel risked his life to maintain a pattern of prayer. This was one of the habits and practices that enabled God to work through him and use him as an effective instrument to lead His people. The great men of God have always kept in meaningful contact with God by putting Him first in their lives and giving Him the first part of the day to work with their minds in study and prayer.

Getting into shape spiritually

The work we are involved in is going to have a tremendous impact on the world—but we must get ourselves in shape first. We can help the church grow by growing ourselves. God will be reluctant to call new members if the foundation of each congregation is not strong.

Acts 20:28 *“Take heed to yourselves.”*

An admonition to leaders in the Church. We must make sure we’re in spiritual shape to serve the flock God is calling. ‘Minister’ means ‘servant’—we are called to serve the people God is calling.

1 Timothy 4:16 *“Take heed to yourself.”*

A minister’s first responsibility is to take care of his relationship with God. He can’t serve anybody unless God comes first!

Be balanced about prayer and study—there may be circumstances when it would be better to pray and study at another time of the day—e.g. in the case of a woman whose husband is unconverted.

Taking this first step and establishing this habit that has contributed toward the effectiveness of the leaders God has chosen in the past, is like turning up the flow of water at a tap. But some of us have holes in our bucket—or even no bottom in the bucket! Study and prayer are very important, but they are not enough. If we are compromising God’s way of life then there are holes in our bucket. We need to find out where those holes are and fill them. We must now take a good look at our bucket.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 *“We do not war after the flesh.”*

We are fighting for the possession of our minds and lives. At one time Satan reigned supreme in our minds, until Christ established a beachhead and began to push inland. Finally Satan was thrown out and we were converted. But there is a resistance movement called ‘human nature’ still loyal to Satan—still there. Human nature resists change at all costs. It is the real enemy who has withdrawn into strongholds in our minds fighting the most difficult type of warfare—guerrilla warfare.

The enemy is well dug in and difficult to see—almost impossible to identify. It doesn’t fight according to the rules and it doesn’t want to be exposed. It is determined to harass and undermine and destroy the occupying power—Christ in us.

“Bringing into captivity every thought...”

The great Napoleon once said: “You can’t win a war on the defensive.” Armies don’t take many prisoners when they fight defensively. The best method of defense is attack—taking the battle to the enemy.

Romans 7:17-23

Paul helped us understand human nature by personifying it as an enemy showing how it victimizes us. It uses terrorist tactics, staying out of sight, making maximum use of camouflage, trying to masquerade as a friend—striking when least expected at our weakest spot. We often fall for its deception and defend our human nature as a friend by justifying for its actions and covering up for it—not realizing it is our enemy. We must come to recognize the enemy or we’ll never win.

Ephesians 4:22 *“The old man...according to the deceitful lusts.”*

The enemy is the ‘old you’ who is difficult to see and knows it can operate most successfully under cover. This enemy must be identified and the battle lines drawn if Christ in us is to succeed. The job of the ministry is to help us fight the enemy—like military advisors.

Jeremiah 17:9

Human nature victimizes us and then deceives us into thinking that what it did was for our own good. We tend to deceive ourselves more than anyone. It’s

hard to believe how our own human nature is so desperately evil and loyal to its old master—Satan. Either we overcome the enemy or it will help destroy us!

Proverbs 16:2

The human mind automatically refuses to face itself. Without God's help, people will generally commit suicide if they ever come to see human nature for what it really is. We must recognize human nature for the enemy it is and stop defending it when someone else offers us help to identify and fight it.

James 1:22-24

Can we specifically name any problems we have conquered in the past year? Do we even know what our problems are? Can we specifically list them? What is it we are working on? Do we have a plan of attack?

After putting God first in our lives, the second step is to conduct a search and destroy mission—to begin to locate and patch up the holes in our spiritual bucket.

Learn to examine yourselves

Some members will come to the minister for an evaluation of how well they're doing or of what's wrong with them—"can you give me a few points I should be working on?" A minister cannot give an accurate evaluation unless he knows the individual very well. It's not the job of the ministry to evaluate and judge people. You must do that yourselves—it's your responsibility. The minister's job is to encourage, inspire, help, teach you how to do this yourself.

2 Corinthians 13:5 *"Examine yourselves!"*

It's up to each of us to examine ourselves and find the holes in our own bucket—to identify the enemy and where he is working in our minds.

1 Corinthians 11:28, 31 *"Let a man examine himself."*

This is something we normally do only once a year at Passover—and often very ineffectively at that! Just sitting in services with a good attitude and listening to sermons alone is not enough. Sermons are the softening operation—to soften up the enemy like offshore shelling or area bombing. But we can't win enemy territory that way even though they are essential. The only way to win enemy territory is to send in the infantry for hand-to-hand combat with the enemy.

But, firstly we must identify where the enemy is dug in. God would rather have us do this ourselves than have to do it for us through some trial.

Proverbs 4:26-27 *"Ponder the path of your feet."*

We need to keep a constant check on ourselves as another habit or practice which is a part of the way of life we live. God spells out in His Word how to do this—most of us haven't been doing this because we don't know how.

Psalms 119:59 *"I thought on my ways."*

David did this as a regular practice. It was a habit in his life that helped him become an effective leader of God's people.

How then do we begin to identify the enemy—the old man—the human nature that victimizes us, remains loyal to Satan and is determined to undermine the real us—Christ in us.

Proverbs 21:2

Human nature is so sneaky and deceitful that it is impossible without God's help to spot it and bring it out into the open so we can get a good look at it.

Psalm 139:23-24

A spiritual diagnosis is not something we can do ourselves. We must ask God for the desire to see the enemy and also for the help in actually seeing our human nature for what it really is. We can't fight the enemy successfully unless we can see him. We need to learn to come out of the defensive crouch most of us have been living in and take the battle to the enemy.

How to examine yourself

The second step in spiritual growth is to analyze ourselves—to find out what's wrong with us. This is not the job of the ministry. They don't have spiritual X-ray vision. They are not there to spy on us. They are there to help us analyze ourselves and to fight the hidden enemy who will prevent us from ever being effective leaders in God's Church. The degree to which we see ourselves is the degree to which we can fight our problems. If we can bring our human nature into the open and get a good look at it, we can see the enemy we are out to destroy.

Before God called us, our minds were occupied by an alien force—Satan. We were his unsuspecting victims until Jesus Christ invaded our minds, overthrew Satan and liberated us from his rule. But there is a resistance movement still loyal to its former master, very active and determined to destroy us. The real enemy is within our own borders, sapping our strength, determined to harass, undermine and overthrow the new power we have welcomed into our minds—Jesus Christ. We must realize that we are constantly at war! The real battle is within our minds. Human nature is an influence actively working for Satan—even when we are converted.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11-12 *“...written for our admonition.”*

There is a direct parallel between Israel taking over the promised land and Christ in the mind of most Christians. They were fighting for the possession of a physical territory—we are fighting for the possession of ultimate stakes—life or death.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 *“Make no covenant with them”*

We can't afford to give the enemy sanctuary or any kind of assistance. Never come to terms with a spiritual problem.

“...neither shall you make marriages with them.”

We can't afford to allow ourselves to live with the enemy or it will eventually destroy us. Human nature must be overcome and caged.

Deuteronomy 7:16-17, 21-23

Most of us would like the enemy to retreat. We'd like God to take our problems away. But no character is built this way. Christ invariably uses the mess we've gotten our lives into prior to baptism to our ultimate advantage. He doesn't remove any problems at baptism. Instead, at baptism, a tremendous power comes into our minds to help us fight and overcome the enemy.

Joshua 23:1-5, 11-13

Israel at this point was a type of the converted Christian—still an enemy within its borders that had to be overcome. But Israel didn't overcome!

Judges 1:19, 21, 27, 29, 31, 33-34

Israel never overcame the enemy within its borders. The Canaanites always remained—always dragged them down, sapping their spiritual strength and ability to serve God.

Judges 2:1-3

The big mistake they made was to allow themselves to coexist with the enemy. Soon they began to think they weren't so bad—made peace treaties with them. They began to look upon them as friends instead of enemies, eventually married them and lived with them.

We must identify the enemy and isolate it so we can engage in hand-to-hand combat. But the enemy is subtle. Like any guerrilla movement, it puts out its propaganda:

“Don't let the minister find out or you're in trouble!”

“The purpose of the Visiting Program, is to get as much evidence against you as possible.”

“The reason we go for counsel is to find out how much the minister knows about us.”

“The less he knows about our problems the better!”

The ministry is not there to get us into trouble—it's there to get us out of trouble. We're in trouble when we sin! We don't go to the minister to find out how much he's got on us, we go with the problems we've diagnosed to get advice on how to handle them. The purpose of the Visiting Program is to provide a workshop situation where we and the minister together get down to the task of engaging our human nature in hand-to-hand combat. He is the military advisor who can help us.

Many members won't come with serious problems because human nature has put out the propaganda:

“If I go to the minister, I'll be disfellowshipped!”

No matter how bad the problem, we will never disfellowship anyone who comes to us for help. Coming to the minister shows the individual has the spiritual understanding to know they have a problem. It also shows that they have enough wisdom to know where to go for help and that they have the courage to ask for help.

Propaganda says:

“My chances for opportunities and responsibilities will go down if the minister finds out.”

An individual's stock goes up when they ask for help. It shows he's making progress because most members can't easily see their problems, don't know what to do about them if they do, and lack the courage to get help when they need it.

How then, do we conduct a spiritual diagnosis? The only way to flush the enemy out into the open is to cut off his supply lines—to starve him out by fasting. Most of us don't want to fast and would never do so on our own initiative. Why do most members fast? Because they know they should. Fasting is one of the most important and least understood subjects in the Bible. It's an ordeal that most of us go through 'to get closer to God.' Human nature puts out a great deal of false propaganda about fasting.

Isaiah 58:3 *“Wherefore have we fasted...”*

How many times have we fasted for the Work and nothing has happened? Or, as one man said: *“All I ever get out of a fast is a bad attitude and a headache.”*

Why is it we become irritable and argumentative during a fast? Some sin more in their relationship with other people during fasting than at any other time. Why?

“You find pleasure and exact all your labours.”

The big mistake we often make is in the way we fast—our normal routine minus food and drink. This is not the way to fast successfully. Mr Herbert W. Armstrong studied, meditated, prayed one hour each throughout the day.

Isaiah 58:4 *“You fast for strife.”*

Fasting the wrong way often brings a bad attitude and a headache—and no more!

We need to prepare in advance physically and spiritually for a fast.

“...not to make your voice to be heard on high”

Mr Herbert W. Armstrong in his Autobiography says: *“Never fast as a means of inducing God to answer!”* (pp 371-372).

Fasting is not a hunger strike—not a means of putting pressure on God to give us what we want.

Why fast then? What is the purpose for fasting? Is it because God wants to see us miserable and to suffer in order to demonstrate how righteous we are?

Isaiah 58:5 *“...to spread sackcloth and ashes under him.”*

Most don't understand why God wants us to fast. He doesn't delight in human suffering—doesn't want to see how much we can take before He answers us. Some feel that the more they suffer through a fast the more likely God is going to answer their prayers.

God says there are three problems with our fasting:

- 1) We fast the wrong way;
- 2) We fast for the wrong reason;
- 3) We fast with a wrong concept of what God gets out of our fasting.

Isaiah 58:5 *“Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?”*

What, then, is the right purpose of fasting?

Isaiah 58:6 *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen...”*

Now, He gives the correct purpose for fasting:

“To loose the bands of wickedness...”

Whose wickedness? What heavy burdens? Who is oppressing who?

Psalms 38:4, 18 *“My iniquities...a heavy burden.”*

Fasting is a time to turn the spotlight on self—to find out what's wrong with us. Most members pray about their shortcomings during their normal prayer live and about the work when they fast. Instead, it should be the other way around—most of our normal prayer life should concern the Work and its needs while we turn the spotlight on our own shortcomings when we fast.

Daniel 9:3-6

Daniel discovered amazing things when he fasted and began to ask God why He wasn't answering their prayers. This was a time of self-examination.

Proverbs 28:16 *“The prince that lacks understanding...”*

How do we handle those under our authority—our wife, our children? How well do we get along with other people—do we oppress them because we lack understanding of where we are breaking God's law?

Zechariah 7:9-10

God says a critical attitude towards others is oppressing them.

Isaiah 1:16-17

An unmerciful attitude towards other people is oppressing them.

Proverbs 14:31

Do we accuse, gossip, become critical when someone makes a mistake? If so, we are a great oppressor. God says: *"Let the oppressed go free!"*

The first purpose of fasting, then, is to find out the differences between God and us—to find out what's wrong with us and to become more like God.

Human nature comes out into the open during a fast—this is a God-ordained method of examining self. Some problems we will never see in clear perspective any other way. We must do this if we are to grow spiritually. Self-examination is vital.

But why fast and why grow spiritually? Is it to make us a better Christian? To help us get into the Kingdom? So our personal lives will be blessed?

Isaiah 58:7 *"...to deal your bread to the hungry"*

Here, to show the second purpose of fasting, God takes the example of a family fasting in order to have more to give. We can't give this way of life unless we first live it. The second purpose of fasting is to have something to give, to become a more effective instrument in the hands of God in order to serve more effectively. Millions in this world are spiritually poor, naked and hungry. God will call them into our house (the Church) if we will change what's wrong with us, seek out the differences between God and us and become more like Him. Then he will use us to feed the hungry, to give to the poor, clothe the naked and bring them into His house and ours.

Isaiah 58:8-11 *"Then shall you call and the Eternal shall answer."*

Find out through fasting why God isn't answering. Don't use fasting to beg God to give you what you want. Never fast to put pressure on God to answer some prayer of yours. Fast to turn the spotlight of God's Word on your life and you will begin to grow spiritually.

"Your health shall spring forth speedily."

Perhaps sickness precipitated a fast in your case. Don't fast in order to get God to heal you. Fast to find out what's wrong with you spiritually. Change what's wrong, repent of it and God will be a lot more willing to answer your prayers for healing.

"Then shall your light rise in obscurity."

God promises to increase our spiritual candle power and also that of the Church. Verses 1 and 2 are speaking of the Church and the great commission given to it. Isaiah 58 and its message should have more meaning in this era of the Church than any other era throughout history. It is more important now than ever before that we fast and examine ourselves in preparation for the future work we have to accomplish.

Men that God has used as leaders in His Work regularly examined themselves by fasting.

How to begin overcoming

We've discussed fasting and its purposes. Some try and still have difficulty seeing their human nature. It won't come all at once. We must persist and keep examining self until we do see, then seek counsel and help from the ministry. A good attitude is not good enough. God wants us to build character—spiritual stamina—and right habit patterns in our lives.

Don't fall into the trap of the spiritual evolutionist: *"Given enough time I will change and improve."* People will change a little and superficially, but they won't really grow spiritually with this philosophy. Don't be ensnared by the concept: *"human nature gradually loses its power after conversion until it eventually disappears"* or, *"we receive such power after baptism that our problems will dwindle to nothing."*

Baptism doesn't take away anything except the penalty of death for all our past mistakes. It doesn't remove human nature. It doesn't remove one problem. It adds God's Holy Spirit. Human nature is still there and it must be exposed, analyzed, overpowered and caged. The more we obey God's Law the more active human nature seems to become.

Romans 7:7-10 *"Without the law sin was dead."*

Paul's human nature lay dormant like a sleeping giant. As Paul's mind became open to the spiritual intent of God's Law and His perfect way of life, human nature began to fight back.

Fasting helps us to see our human nature more clearly—hunger brings the enemy out into the open so we can get a good look at him. But what should we look for while fasting—what should we study? Where do we start examining our human nature? The Bible gives us several spiritual checklists:

- 1) The Ten Commandments
Don't assume you are keeping all of these. Many don't keep the first one properly.
- 2) 2 Timothy 3:1-5
Have any of these rubbed off onto us? We are the products of the society described here.
- 3) Mark 7:21-23
Examine yourself in the light of these. Follow marginal references, concordance, Naves Topical Bible. Turn the spotlight of God's Word on yourself.
- 4) Galations 5:19-24—the works of the flesh.
Also the positive aspect—the fruit of the Spirit. Do we have any of these? If not, why not?
- 5) 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
Love is the basis of God's Law. Study this chapter in other translations and you will find plenty to begin working on.

Study in conjunction with prayer and meditation when you fast. We must be willing to realize we are far worse than anyone ever said or thought we were. Make a list—be sure to write down what you discover about yourself because human nature has a built-in memory destruct system.

Then decide which one is the biggest problem—enemy number one. Ask: *"Is this a symptom, or is this the cause of the problems?"* *"Why is this a problem to me?"* e.g. unfriendliness can result from an inferiority complex—get to the root cause. Keep asking *"Why?"* The more we understand the enemy, the better we will be equipped to fight it. Learn to do your homework and then go the to minister for help.

Philippians 2:12

The minister can't piggyback us or he'll hurt us. He can help tremendously if we've done our groundwork first. We must learn to analyze ourselves in the light of God's Word and pinpoint our problems. When the minister comes around, we should get out our list and go over it with him. He'll be able to help us then in ways we never thought possible. Many people in God's Church have discovered there are long-standing problems in their lives that haven't begun to budge until they asked the minister for help.

Some are afraid of going to the ministry for help. No matter how bad the problem is, we will never disfellowship anyone who asks for help, won't discuss it with our wives, nor even mention it to another minister where it's none of his business. We won't use it in a sermon as an example for all the Church to hear while you squirm in your seat. The ministry is there to be 'helpers of your joy' (1 Corinthians 1:24), not to condemn you for the mistakes you make.

How to prevent sin

The siren-song of many protestant religions is the belief that there is nothing that you have to do, Christ has done it all for you.

Acts 3:19

'Converted' means to turn about—to go the opposite way—to change. The only way to do this is to use God's Spirit. Very few know how to put the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. Human nature is a constant pull, like gravity. It takes effort to resist gravity. Even when we succeed in overcoming gravity it is still there—it is never removed. We must control it or it will control us. We must decide to resist or we'll go the way gravity pulls us.

God allows us to decide to resist human nature if we want to.

Philippians 2:12-13 *"For it is God who works in you..."*

We need to understand the partnership principle by which God works in us. When does God's Spirit begin to help? Is there anything we have to do first?

1 Corinthians 3:9 *"Labourers together with God..."*

Both parties have their responsibilities. God won't do for us what we can do for ourselves. He won't do what we can't do until we're doing all we can do.

2 Peter 1:10 *"Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."*

We have a part of our own to do. We have to work in conjunction with God. Repentance alone is not enough—a repentant but unconverted mind will lose out constantly against the pulls of human nature. Like a blindfolded man trying to hit a target with bow and arrows—occasionally he'll be on target, but mostly he'll miss. A repentant but unconverted mind doesn't have the power to obey the spirit of God's Law. God's Spirit helps us make the right choice, but it doesn't remove free moral agency.

The first function of God's Spirit in our lives is a teaching function.

John 14:26 *"It will teach you..."*

It doesn't prod us or kick us with a number nine boot.

John 16:13 *"It will guide you into all truth"*

The Holy Spirit never takes over the mind to remove the powers of choice and decision.

1 Corinthians 2:10 “...revealed by His Spirit.”

It reveals, it doesn't compel us to do anything against our will.

Philippians 2:5 “Let (allow) this mind to be in you...”

The power of choice is always ours to reject or accept what God is trying to teach us through His Spirit.

Romans 6:13 “Yield yourselves to God.”

Christ is not a slave driver—the choice is up to us.

Romans 8:14 “As many as are led by the Spirit of God.”

It doesn't lead us along by a ring in the nose. The Holy Spirit isn't a wheelbarrow into which God dumps us at baptism so he can wheel us wherever He wants us to go. It leads by revealing the way to go.

The decision to obey is always ours!

Many people don't see clearly what God is revealing, or don't make the decision to obey soon enough. Therefore they sin. Sin is a spiritual accident and accidents are the result of ignorance, carelessness and weakness. Grace is a type of insurance policy to 'cover' accidents. If we keep having automobile accidents the company will withdraw its policy. Grace—unmerited pardon—forgiveness—is not an end in itself. It is merely the means to an end—the building of holy, righteous character. We must learn to prevent spiritual accidents. We need to begin each day determined not to compromise with sin.

Romans 8:3 “...condemned sin in the flesh.”

Christ showed it is possible to live without sin—with God's help. What if our salvation depended upon our living just one day perfectly without sin? Would we live that day any differently than we normally do? Would we study and pray more diligently in the morning? Would we guard our minds from temptation? Christ had to live that way every day of his life—diligently watching for every circumstance that would ensnare him.

Hebrews 5:7 “...He was heard in that he feared.”

He knew how easy it was to sin. Remember, there was no plan of redemption for Christ—one sin and He was finished forever! How did He do it?

Psalms 16:8 “I set the Lord always before me.”

He didn't just try to obey God as most of us try. He set His mind to do what God would have done in His place.

Psalms 17:3 “I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.”

Don't let human nature propagandize you into believing you can never be perfect. We'll never hit the target if we're not aiming for it. Christ knew his weaknesses and set His mind every single minute against giving in to sin.

Psalms 39:1 “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not...”

Learn to recognize the circumstances in which you sin and set out not to sin.

1 John 2:1 “...that you sin not.”

It's better not to sin than to sin and be forgiven. Forgiveness never puts Humpty Dumpty together again exactly as he was before. Forgiveness doesn't bring back the character that has been destroyed. Character is like a huge building—it is built slowly one brick at a time. But it can be destroyed quickly with a crane swinging a ball on the end of a chain!

Don't let human nature kid you—sinning does make a difference! Forgiveness doesn't make us as good as we were before we sinned—it removes the death penalty, it doesn't replace lost character that has been smashed or eroded away.

Make no concessions—set the mind against sin. We should know what our sins are and be determined not to allow them any ground to maneuver on. We must learn to analyze the circumstances in which we have spiritual accidents and set our minds to avoid them before the next accident.

Don't let human nature con you onto thinking: "O well, it's only a physical thing anyway."

Romans 1:19-20

The physical things God does reveal His attitude towards his Law. His whole creation is a law-abiding creation. So the physical things we do reveal our spiritual attitudes and attributes. Tithing, unclean meats, stealing, adultery, getting drunk are all physical, but they also reveal what's spiritually wrong with us.

Another type of propaganda put out by our human nature is: "But it's just a little thing." Good things start out small and grow big—so do evil habits.

Colossians 3:23 *"Whatsoever you do..."*

Live your life as God would have you live it—as He would live it if He were a human being.

Colossians 3:17 *"Do all in the name of the Lord."*

Don't allow yourself to compromise on small things—they are as important as the big things.

2 Chronicles 11:16 *"...set their hearts to seek the Lord."*

Learn to set your mind in the morning against sin and towards God's way. Be determined to go against sin. Live one day at a time. Guard against circumstances in which sin occurs most and be aware as those circumstances begin to shape up around and ahead of you each day and avoid them—flee fornication, idolatry, etc.

Psalms 105:4

The first step in preventing sin is to orient our minds toward God and against sin as a daily habit. We must be determined not to let sin reign in our mind.

This is another daily habit that Christ, David and others practiced as a part of the way of life they were living. If we are going to become successful as leaders in God's Work, we need to have the same approach toward sin and practice the same habits they did.

How God's Spirit works in us

How is God's Spirit supposed to work in our lives? We have seen so far how the Holy Spirit has a leading, guiding, educating function. Christ in our minds is like a spiritual advisor who helps us grasp understanding of the Bible and God's way of life. But how else does that Spirit work? What is it supposed to do? Is it possible to detect the Holy Spirit acting in our minds?

Not only does the Holy Spirit have a teaching function, it also acts like an early-warning system, warning us against sin.

John 16:8 *"It will reprove the world of sin."*

It has a convicting function as well as a teaching function. But how does it do this? What mechanism of the mind does it use? Is it something we can control?

God's spirit convicts through the most delicate instrument in the entire universe—the human conscience.

John 8:9 “...*convicted by their own conscience...*”

His Spirit triggers thoughts that act upon the conscience. The conscience can be used as a guide only so long as right knowledge has been directed into it.

Hebrews 9:14 “...*purge your conscience from dead works.*”

Repentance and conversion begins a process of re-educating our conscience.

Hebrews 10:22 “*Having our minds sprinkled from an evil conscience.*”

Our conscience needs to be cleaned up—re-educated. The conscience is a very delicate mechanism that needs to be kept sensitive or we'll find ourselves in trouble. The conscience is like a seismograph—a delicate instrument designed to detect earth tremors. If it is not cared for, or if we misuse or drop it, it won't be balanced enough or sensitive enough to detect the smallest tremor.

Some have wrecked their consciences before conversion and have serious problems after baptism as a result. A person who always compromised standards will have difficulty detecting God's Spirit working in his mind for a long time after baptism.

We must learn to heed God's Spirit triggering thoughts in our minds. Be sensitive to your conscience—don't expect a bullhorn in your ear when the Holy Spirit is working with you.

Ephesians 4:20 “*Grieve not the Spirit.*”

We quench or stifle the Holy Spirit when we don't heed. We must be responsive and ready to act.

Revelation 3:20 “*Behold I am standing at the door and am knocking*” (Greek).

Christ doesn't break down the door of our minds—He knocks politely. This is being said to a group of people who will have compromised standards of prayer and study to become so lukewarm towards God's way that they won't have many standards any more.

Luke 12:35-36 “...*may open to Him immediately.*”

We must learn to have an immediate response. Don't put things off when God's Spirit prompts you or you'll forget. Instant responsiveness needs to become a habit pattern in our lives. Be mentally prepared to move.

Our conscience is like a compass. If it has been neglected and become filled with salt spray and oil a sailor can't follow or rely on it any more—but if it is delicately balanced and sensitive to the earth's magnetic field, then he had better follow it and respond to it or he'll sail off course.

Condition your mind so that it is afraid not to respond to thoughts triggered by the Holy Spirit. Character is built in little ways, so learn to respond to the most delicate promptings. If we follow through, we'll find the signal gets stronger as time goes on.

James 4:8 “*Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you.*”

We have a responsibility to do something to draw near to God. He makes the first big move by opening our minds, but then it is up to us—prayer, study and meditation—to begin to reciprocate.

Like a radio station, the closer we are to the transmitter, the stronger the signal. This same principle works in reverse too—the closer we are to Satan, the stronger his signal comes through.

What about the quality of the receiver? Our conscience is like the crystal in a crystal set that receives the signal and the coil—like our minds—transforms the signal into action. The more delicately balanced the crystal and the fewer impurities in it, the more effectively it receives the signal. A delicately balanced conscience, receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, will learn to recognize temptation before it is too late.

1 Corinthians 6:18 *“Flee fornication!”*

This applies to any situation where we may be tempted. The Holy Spirit working through our conscience helps us to recognize situations that are wrong and in which we have succumbed to sin in the past.

Genesis 39:12 *“...and fled and got him out.”*

Joseph was able to take preventative action in time because he was tuned in to the promptings of God’s Spirit.

Romans 14:22-23 *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”*

If we do something we think might be wrong, then it is sin—not necessarily technically—but it damages the most delicate mechanism in our mind—the conscience.

Revelation 22:17 *“The Spirit and the bride say come.”*

God invites us. We have to put forward the effort to follow.

Acts 7:51 *“You do always resist the Holy Spirit!”*

They made it impossible for God’s Spirit to get through. Sometimes we may not have the will to follow God’s Spirit by responding to its promptings. If so, we’d better pray for the desire to do what the Spirit is showing us and not resist or our minds may be damaged.

1 Timothy 4:2 *“...having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”*

A person who sins and knows better is searing his conscience. Other translations say: ‘cauterized’; ‘hardened’; ‘dead—as seared flesh’. When we cauterize something, we destroy it.

John 9:41 *“...therefore your sin remains.”*

He said this because of the terrible damage they had done to their consciences and minds by forcing themselves to go against what they knew to be right. Christ said of these Pharisees that they had come dangerously close to committing the unpardonable sin.

Repeated compromise with the conscience deadens it and will eventually kill it.

1 Samuel 13:12 *“I forced myself therefore.”*

He knew better. We cannot compromise with our conscience and get away with it. If we keep ignoring God trying to work in our minds, the signals will get weaker and weaker until they finally don’t come any more. The more we respond in a right way, the stronger those signals will become and the more of Christ will show through as he lives His life in us.

The more of Christ there is in each of us, the more we are going to be examples to the flock of God and leaders among his people. The more effective we are, the more effective His Body is going to be in getting this message out and the better light we will be to this sin-sick and dying world.

The importance of study and correct meditation

God's Spirit works like the rest of His creation—according to basic laws. There is a cause for every effect and there is a cause for the effect of God's Spirit working in our lives.

John 14:16

Greek for 'Comforter' is 'parakletos' which literally means 'called to one's side'. The Holy Spirit is an advisor, a guide, an aide and counselor. It does not, by itself, put new knowledge into our minds—it acts upon knowledge that is already there. We must put the knowledge there in the first place for God's Spirit to act upon it. The human mind has an amazing recall system—mostly used to only one tenth of its capacity. We must study God's Word then His Spirit gives us understanding and triggers thoughts from the knowledge that has been absorbed.

John 14:26 *"...and bring all things to your remembrance."*

Studying God's Word is like putting money into a bank account—it gains interest as the Holy Spirit acts upon it. A person who seldom studies is spiritually bankrupt. When he needs to draw on that reserve, he won't have anything.

Psalms 119:105

The more we study, the more understanding God's Spirit can give us. Lack of Bible Study limits the ability of God to work with us through His Spirit.

Psalms 119:10-11 *"Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin."*

We need to understand how the human mind works. David realized his first reactions were carnal, selfish and resentful of authority. The mind has well-worn grooves or cart tracks worn there over a lifetime as a result of our human nature taking us down that route again and again. When we are stimulated in a certain way, our mind analyses the situation and flops into a familiar groove and we do down the chute again. This is called a 'conditional response.'

Studying God's law and meditating on its application to our lives, helps to recondition our responses and begin right habit patterns. Our minds must wear new grooves that take us in the right direction. Instead of our reactions being carnal and selfish based on greed, lust and vanity, they must become spiritual. We must learn to react and live as God would if He were a human being.

God's Spirit will help, but it can do so only if we provide it with the ingredients it needs—a repentant mind that has had right knowledge put into it and that has the desire and will to do what is right.

Philippians 2:13 *For it is God which works in you both to will..."*

The Holy Spirit will strengthen our will, but only once we've made the decision to go God's way in that particular circumstance. If we don't have the will, we'd better ask God for it. But God's Spirit must have knowledge to work with first.

Psalms 119:59

David analyzed the occasions and circumstances in which he sinned. he noted the conditions that acted upon his weaknesses and which led to the conditioned responses in his mind that were carnal and sinful. He realized his past experiences had built wrong habit patterns that became problems after conversion.

He armed his mind by meditating on the right response ahead of time. This is the first vital step in developing right responses guided by God's Spirit.

Meditation is vital because the mind's recall system does not readily distinguish between real and synthetic or vicarious experiences.

Letting the mind wander in a daydream world is very harmful. Allowing the mind to exercise itself in a sinful practice is the same as sinning. Christ said, "Whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his mind!" Also, "He who hates his brother is a murderer"—even though no action follows. This is because the brain accepts those thoughts and registers them in the same category as it does the real experience. Each time we allow the mind to exercise itself in a wrong practice or in wrong thought patterns, the rut becomes a little deeper and harder to jump out of. Meditating on our problems in a wrong way ingrains them deeper into the mind.

Christ knew that what we let into our minds is going to affect us in ways we never realize. Psychologists have also discovered this same fact. Dallin H. Oaks, President of Brigham Young University, talking to students about pornography and its effects upon the mind, said:

"For your own good, avoid it. Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food.

"...The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions, bad food will only make you sick, but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call the brain.

"The brain won't vomit back filth. Once recorded it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life."

(L.A. Times, Aug. 8, 1974)

In order to enable us to build right habit patterns and holy, righteous character, God built the human mind with the proclivity to develop conditioned responses as a result of both real and synthetic experiences. We must learn to use this valuable facility in the way God intended.

Psalms 119:148

David didn't just read the Bible. He studied it and thought deeply about what his reactions were and what they should be. He mentally rehearsed right reactions, which his brain recorded for future use.

He increased his chances of reacting the right way by meditating on the correct responses to circumstances that normally led him into sin.

Psalms 119:165 *"Nothing shall cause them to stumble" (mgn)*

We break wrong habit patterns by consciously forcing ourselves to think through and to do things the right way. Study makes it possible for God's Spirit to work with our minds. Knowledge obtained by study of God's Word is the vital ingredient that the Holy Spirit acts upon.

2 Timothy 2:15 *"Study to show yourself approved."*

We must put God's Word into our minds and meditate deeply upon it if we are ever to become like him.

Colossians 3:16 *"Let the Word of God dwell in you richly."*

God's Spirit doesn't force us to study—this is our responsibility. God always follows the partnership principle in developing character. He takes the first step in calling us. After that, it's up to us to do our part before we can expect Him to give us the power to overcome.

Study the life of Christ, Epistles of Paul, Proverbs—these will reveal how to react in a right way. We all need to think deeply about their application to our sins, weaknesses and life. We should rehearse the right response in our minds ahead of time. Pray for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. This way we will be conditioning our mind to react in the opposite direction to that in which human nature automatically takes us.

Hebrews 5:12-14 *"...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised..."*

Make full use of your time. Meditation is the time we spend exercising the mind—doing our roadwork—in preparation for the battles ahead. We must study regularly and we must meditate deeply upon God's word if we are going to grow spiritually to the point where we can help those now coming into God's Church in greater numbers.

Regular study and meditation on God's Word is a practice followed by the men who have become effective leaders of God's people down through history.

How to pray effectively

What is effective prayer and meaningful contact with God? Is fervent prayer effective prayer? Is thankfulness the key to effective prayer? How about the length of a prayer?

People pray fervently during an earthquake and still perish! The Pharisee who said, "I thank Thee, O God..." was grateful but God didn't hear his prayer. Christ condemned the Pharisees' long prayers while they broke the Laws of God. These things alone don't make prayer effective. There are laws which govern the functioning of God's Spirit. There are also laws of effective prayer which an individual must follow if he is to grow spiritually.

Many of God's people have weak and insipid prayer lives and a lot of their prayers can go unanswered. Why? What is the chief cause of unanswered prayer? There are obvious conditions we must fulfill if God is going to answer our prayers.

Luke 18:13

We must have a repentant attitude if God is going to hear us.

1 John 3:22

Another prerequisite to answered prayer—but this doesn't directly affect praying itself. Is there something in how we pray or what we pray about that will prevent our prayers being effective?

Matthew 26:38-39 *"Not as I will, but as You will."*

We must be seeking God's will in our prayers and not trying to get our own way all the time. This also will prevent God from answering our prayers.

But, even if a person is trying to do all of these, there is something else that will stop prayers being effective—even if they are fervent, even if they're full of gratitude, even if the individual prays for a long period on his or her knees. What is it? Where is the area where most of us go astray when we pray and end up with ineffective prayers?

James 4:1-4 *"...because you ask amiss."*

The chief cause of unanswered prayer is selfishness! Human beings are naturally dedicated to serving self. We have to learn not to be self-centered in our prayers.

Job 42:7-10 “...when he prayed for his friends.”

God had already accepted Job’s repentance, obedience and his seeking God’s will in his life. But He didn’t heal him until he had prayed for his three friends.

There is a law of intercessory prayer—Job was totally self-righteous and self-centered. His problems and sickness turned his mind in on himself even more—until God personally intervened and showed Job how insignificant he really was. Even then, God didn’t answer his prayers for healing until he got his mind off himself and onto the needs of his three friends.

Genesis 20:6-7, 17-18 “...he shall pray for you.”

Abimelech was a God-fearing man. Why couldn’t he pray for himself? Once again, Abraham’s fears had been self-centered, afraid for his own life. He even lied to protect himself. God had to teach him that he will answer the prayers of one whose concern is for others—whose prayer-life is not centered around self.

1 Samuel 12:23

Samuel was a priest. He had responsibility to pray and intercede for others. The sin of selfishness separates us from God so he cannot answer our prayers. Some people’s prayer-lives are so self-centered that God won’t answer their prayers for their own good!

Exodus 32:11-14

There is no mention of the people’s righteousness here. Moses prayed and interceded for unconverted people while they were still sinning and God heard him.

Numbers 14:17-20

This wasn’t a self-centered prayer; it was God-centered. Moses was interceding for the people and showing God that here was a wonderful opportunity for Him to show how powerful, great, longsuffering, merciful and forgiving he was. This was an effective prayer because it got answers! Fervency came as a result of what he was praying about and how much it meant to him personally. A totally selfish person cannot be very fervent about things that require an outgoing concern for others.

Psalms 83:13-18 “...that they may seek your name.”

David’s prayers were God-centered and reflected a concern for the ultimate good of others. Most of our hymns are the prayers of David—some people don’t like them when they first come to services. This is because they are so different from what they have been used to. Typical ‘Christian’ hymns are popular because they are centered on self. The most popular protestant hymn is ‘In the Garden’—“I come to the garden alone (just me and Jesus)...and He comes to me and He walks with me and He talks with me...” It depicts a God who we have dedicated to our services in a selfish, self-centered religion.

James 5:15-16 “Pray for one another.”

The prayer of faith is the minister’s prayer. There is a flow of intercessory prayer. When we stop being so totally concerned about ourselves and center our prayer-life around others, we can then begin to understand the concern God has for each one of us.

The ‘Lord’s’ prayer starts off: “Our Father, ...Hallowed be your name...give us our daily bread, forgive us, ...deliver us...”

But there is something even more important yet if God is going to regularly answer our prayers and if we are going to establish meaningful contact with Him.

Matthew 19:16

He desperately wanted to be in God's Kingdom. Christ had to show him that his number-one problem was selfishness that was preventing him from keeping even the first of the ten commandments he claimed to be keeping.

Matthew 19:27 *"What shall we have therefore?"*

The disciples thought they were really sacrificing for the Kingdom. Christ gave them a parable to show them what their motives were and what their motives would have to become if they were going to be of any use to God as leaders of His people.

Matthew 20:1-14 *"You have made them equal to us..."*

The purpose of the husbandman (Christ) was to get the Work done before the end of the day. Their purpose was to get the reward at the end of the day. Had their purpose been the same as that of the husbandman, they would have rejoiced when he brought labourers in at the eleventh hour—"At last we have enough help to finish the Work before darkness falls!" Instead, their selfishness caused them to get upset.

The reason we are in the Church is to get the Work done. God has ordained that we in this age obtain salvation through doing the work—it is a gift, but He won't give the gift to anyone who is in the Church for selfish reasons.

God knows more about an individual's motives through his prayer-life than in any other way. He puts us in His Church to support and pray for the Work. Does our prayer-life reflect a deep understanding of the reason we are here? If not, God won't be ready to answer our prayers. We do need to pray for ourselves, our needs and problems, but our prayer-life must become Work-centered if it is going to be effective.

2 Corinthians 1:11 (RSV) *"You also must help us by prayer!"*

Colossians 4:2-3, 12

If the people of God stopped praying for the Work then the Work would grind to a halt. An individual is converted and will grow spiritually to the degree his prayers and actions are behind the Work Christ is doing through His Church. Our prayers are effective to the degree they are centered away from self and toward the needs of this Work and the needs of others.

We have been called to serve

Why should we concern ourselves with growing spiritually? Is it to increase our chances of getting into the Kingdom of God? Is it to ensure we have added blessings in this lifetime? What is the reason for all this effort—self-analysis, pinpointing our weaknesses, setting our mind and resources to overcoming them, fasting, studying, meditating, seeking God's help in overcoming sin—what is it all for?

One of Christ's first actions in His Kingdom will be to demonstrate what an office in His Kingdom is all about.

Luke 12:37

Christ will set the example of what we will have to do. When we are resurrected, there won't be any cities to rule over. There'll just be smoking rubble with a few sick, dejected, discouraged human beings sitting around wanting to die. Our job will be to serve them, clean their sores, bandage their wounds, find shelter, food and water, persuade them that life really is worth living after all and begin to build our cities with our hands from the rubble of a collapsed civilization.

Isaiah 61:4

We won't even have huge crowds to deal with—maybe only a dozen or so to start of with. We are going to have to serve them. Many will be mentally sick and perhaps incapable of helping themselves. We'll have to scrabble around in the rubble and do it for them for a while.

Luke 22:24-27

The world's concept of greatness centers around how much we are served. The 'great' one is the one sitting down surrounded by servants. Christ brought a totally new concept to greatness—we are great in God's eyes according to the amount we serve others. Anyone can be great regardless of what position he or she holds.

We sometimes look upon service as the way to become great—become a deacon, a minister, etc.—but Christ revealed that God measures greatness by the amount we serve others.

Philippians 2:5-7

True service 'empties self'. It never exalts self or seeks to establish a reputation for self. It involves self-sacrifice—we have to be willing to give up something. Service involves a battle of self-interest against the interest and needs of others.

John 13:1-5

Christ had every reason to think of self that night with what He knew was about to take place. Someone had dropped the ball and forgotten to arrange for the foot washing. He saw a need and fulfilled it. There was no Old Testament prophecy he was trying to fulfill. True service has its mind on the needs of others and not on itself. The reason for growing and overcoming human nature is so we can serve others more effectively.

Philippians 2:19-20 *"For all seek their own..."*

Human beings naturally serve self. Adam and Eve reached out to take for themselves what they wanted. They called their first son 'Cain' which means 'get'. All mankind has served itself ever since. God even uses the term: 'serve themselves of them' when one groups of human beings exploits another. We have reared a whole generation of young people called the 'now generation'. "I want it now! And if I can't have it now, I'm going to tear apart your railway carriage, your home, your society!"

Selfishness is the greatest barrier to service.

Some will serve in order to get for self—satisfaction, recognition, as an exercise in self-righteousness.

2 Corinthians 9:1-2 *"As touching the ministering to the saints..."*

In spite of its problems, the congregation at Corinth had a reputation for service.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

We often use these verses in the context of giving offerings to do the Work of the Church—that of preaching the gospel. Paul uses them here in the context of serving other members of the Church. "Not grudgingly"—not because we have to; "Not of necessity"—not because it is expected of us; "Not of covetousness"—not because we hope to gain something from it. Real service empties self and wants and expects nothing in return. The attitude behind what we do is what is vital.

2 Corinthians 9:8,10 *“God is able to make all grace abound.”*

If we serve others out of the desire to help them, God will be more willing to overlook our mistakes and give us the extra help we need to overcome our problems.

There is a cause for every effect. If we serve others in self-sacrifice, emptying self, expecting and wanting nothing in return—the effect will be extra help from God so we'll be able to serve to an even greater degree in the future.

Selfishness is the greatest barrier to spiritual growth because selfishness is the greatest barrier to service. God promises to ‘increase the fruit of our righteousness’ if we learn to serve others.

Many are embarrassed to serve the elderly, the sick and those in need.

Embarrassment is an inward-looking and selfish thing. Elderly and sick people need company. They need someone to help look after their yard. Be hospitable and learn to share your lives and homes with others. Invite others into your life with you.

We must overcome the desire to serve self and acquire the desire to serve others if we are ever to fulfill the whole purpose for living—to share what we have with as many others as possible. This is God's motive for doing everything He does. Ask Him to help you make it yours as well.

What are the habits that the great leaders of God's people have practiced? Basically there are seven:

1. They have learned to put God first in their lives and in their daily schedule by getting up early to study and pray and meditate upon God's Word and its application to their lives.
2. They have recognized their greatest responsibility was to take heed to themselves and their own spiritual condition and to keep in shape spiritually by examining themselves and finding out what was wrong with them personally through fasting so they could become more effective instruments in God's hands.
3. They determined not to compromise with sin and set their minds to obey God in every circumstance.
4. They carefully guarded their minds and protected the most delicate mechanism in that mind—the conscience—by learning to quickly respond to God's Holy Spirit as He used it to work with them.
5. They practiced regular study and meditation to condition their minds to respond in a right way to circumstances to live as God would live if He were a human being.
6. They learned to pray effectively and establish meaningful contact with God through regular and effective prayer.
7. They understood that the office of authority in God's government is the office of a servant and that they were called to get a job done and not just to receive personal salvation. They allowed this understanding to become the motivating force for everything they did.

These are the practices we much practice and practice until they become habit if we are to become effective leaders in the Work and Church of God.

Sermonette preparation

It takes years of preparation to be able to give good sermonettes. It is only by preparing constantly with study, prayer and meditation along with keeping in close contact with the congregation and their needs that we will be successful with our sermonettes. Most important of all is our contact with God—a stream can rise no higher than its source and neither can we. The way we live will affect the credibility of our message no matter how well we may prepare. Ralph Waldo Emerson summarized it by saying: “what you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you're saying!”

The purpose of sermonettes

- a. To serve as an introduction to the service—to get their minds off the physical and onto the spiritual—to get their minds in gear for the main course to follow.
- b. A sermonette serves to edify the congregation on a limited subject—one particular point. It is not just an assignment or a filler—it must be of value to them.
- c. It helps a man practice before the congregation. No one will grow to his full potential without the right sort of opportunity.

How long should a sermonette be?

Between 10 and 12 minutes. If we shoot for 10 minutes then we'll easily get it within the allotted 12. If you need to go beyond 12 minutes then ask for more time—15 minutes is the maximum. Avoid regularly asking for more time. Occasionally the minister will allow more than the maximum 15 minutes. If so, be sure to keep within the limit he sets.

Selecting a topic

A sermonette must have a definite theme. Some try to cover too much ground and end up with a hash containing good ideas but too many scriptures and lacking any connecting or underlying theme to make them meaningful.

Always try to expand a point or principle. never try to condense a subject. Take a point and amplify it. Don't attempt to shrink it into the time allowed.

Things to avoid in selecting a topic

- a. Avoid new doctrine. If in doubt, check it with the minister ahead of time.
- b. Avoid trying to save the congregation. This is completely outside the scope and purpose of a sermonette.
- c. Avoid correction. Within the short time limit you will only succeed in offending the congregation.
- d. Avoid personal pet peeves and things you personally don't like. never use a sermonette (or a sermon) to air personal gripes or to grind a personal axe or ride a personal hobby horse.
- e. Avoid obscure picky points that are not relevant. They never help people to grow spiritually.
- f. Don't speculate—this is the fast way to heresy. Preach the Word as you have been taught.

Four types of subject to follow

- a. Explain a difficult scripture. This is the best type of sermonette to start off with. Members need this type of subject more than we tend to think.
- b. Instruct them on a principle of Christian living.
e.g. How to teach your children about God
How to use your second tithe
Why go to a minister for anointing
- c. Exhort them to do something. This could include correcting a minor problem in a positive way.
e.g. Get adequate prayer in during the Feast of Tabernacles
Cut down on the noise during services
Pray or fast for themselves or for someone else
- d. Encourage and inspire the congregation.
e.g. Examples of answered prayer
Exceptional examples of healing or of God's intervention
Examples from the Bible

Always check your idea with the minister who will be in charge of the service and also with the one who is scheduled to preach the sermon—have more than one idea if possible.

Organizing the sermonette

Like a speech, a sermonette has four parts:

- a. The S.P.S. After deciding the topic, write down the S.P.S. which states the one point you wish to get across.
e.g. "I want to explain one reason why God has us to go to a minister to be anointed when we are sick."
Or, "I want to show you why Colossians 2:16 is misunderstood by so many people and clearly explain what it does mean."

Occasionally, for the sake of suspense, you may not wish to state the S.P.S. at the beginning of the sermonette. But it is still essential to write one down before you begin to organize the material you have collected.

Lack of a clearly defined and stated S.P.S. at this stage of preparation has resulted in the launching of more lead balloons than any other thing. Never allow yourself the luxury of by-passing this first step!

- b. The Body Now begin to gather together all your material, scriptures, examples, quotations and comments. Write them down and carefully scrutinize each one in the light of the S.P.S. If it doesn't fit the S.P.S. then don't use it! Never try to squeeze an idea, statement, example or scripture that doesn't exactly fit the S.P.S. into the sermonette.

Should you wish to use a particular example, and it doesn't fit, then go back one step and rewrite the S.P.S. and start again.

Now take those that do fit the S.P.S. and begin to arrange them in a logical sequence under the S.P.S. You may not be able to use all the material. The best and most effective sermonettes normally have only one or, at the most, two points and no more than three scriptures.

Be sure to fulfill your S.P.S.—say what you said you would say—explain what you claimed what you were going to explain—answer the question you asked or promised you were going to answer—AND NO MORE!

- c. The Conclusion Plan your conclusion and write it down word for word just the way you want to say it. This conclusion should be included in your final notes—it's so easy to forget at the time.

Make sure the conclusion is logical and that it fits the S.P.S. Organize your sermonette from the S.P.S. to the concluding statement—never the other way around. Many flops have occurred when people have tried to organize sermonettes around a unique or catchy concluding statement or idea.

Often the conclusion may be a restatement of the S.P.S. in a slightly different form.

- d. The Introduction Now go back and plan an appropriate introduction. Relate it to your main point and be sure it leads logically into your S.P.S. It must grab the audience's attention and make them want to listen. Never start by saying, "Would you please turn to..."

Don't make the mistake of planning your whole sermonette in order to allow you to use a certain catchy introduction. You may end up with a good introduction, but the rest is bound to be weak. The introduction is the last thing you write down in organizing a sermonette.

As with the conclusion, write out the introductory statement—preferably word for word—in the final notes.

Sermonette delivery

Pray that God will use you in your sermonettes—we often let our vanity, inferiority complexes and other problems get in the way. God can shake a limp dish-rag pretty effectively if He wants to. Really want to give something worthwhile to your audience. Talk about it—pray about it ahead of time.

Most men don't put enough zeal or intensity into their sermonettes. Quit being casual and put your heart into the message. Think of how much the congregation needs to have what you're about to say. However, don't go to the extreme of being bombastic. You don't have to look angry to look sincere. Be warm and friendly, but not weak and wishy-washy. Speak to them instead of preaching at them.

Make the Bible live for them. Most members just read their Bibles. You have an opportunity to put a new dimension into their study. Bring it up to date and to life by putting real characters into their study—help them to see, feel, hear, smell what the Bible says. We can do this only if Bible study is exciting to us personally—only if we ourselves are thinking deeply and meditating on it.

e.g. Exodus 12:37-38

Make this scripture come alive—don't drop your intensity and read it in Old English.

"There were 600,000 men besides women and children—a mob scene of some 3,000,000 people. Have you ever tried to drive six ducks, five geese, fifteen chickens, two goats and a cow along a dusty road. Multiply this some 400,000 times and what do you have? Ever tried to prepare in one morning for a trip—mothers chasing children, children chasing one another—whooping, hollering, dancing—noise dust and babble. Eventually a whole mass, like a vibrating amoeba, moves along in the direction of Succoth, 35 miles away."

or, Exodus 18:13-14

"Here was Moses sitting on a rock in the middle of the desert trying to solve the problems of 3,000,000 Israelites. The only tribe that had any concept of a queue was Ephraim—ever see a crowd of Englishmen trying to persuade a bunch of Frenchmen to form a queue and wait their turn? Another mob scene—people

trampling on one another—knock-down-drag-out brawls to get to Moses. Imagine standing three whole days in the burning sun to complain about your neighbor's ass having put its foot in your chicken's nest and breaking half-a-dozen eggs—and he refuses to pay up because he claims your chicken never should have built its nest there anyway! Multiply that 100,000 times.

Think deeply, fill in the gaps, dramatize it, make the Bible live for them. Read the scriptures with intensity. Most men let their intensity drop off drastically when they begin to quote from the Bible or any other source material. Practice the scriptures you want to read ahead of time—be able to put feeling into them. Don't wade through unnecessary verses to get to the one you want—paraphrase—give the background in your own words. Then hit the verse that says what you want. Avoid attempting to twist your tongue around King James' English. Modernize it for them. Remember, the only inspired part of your sermonette will be the scriptures you read. Make them one of the focal points of the whole sermonette instead of an appendage.

Be ready to give a sermonette anytime—have one in the back of your Bible for emergencies.

The evaluation

Don't miss this vitally important step. Ask the minister for an evaluation of your sermonette. Don't expect him to come to you. Try to apply the evaluation. It will be some of the most valuable advice you will get.

Preparation and organization of sermons

The purpose of sermons

The overall purpose of preaching is to give people the knowledge and understanding of how to change their lives and the motivation to do so. The Bible calls this 'feeding the flock'.

Acts 20:28 *"...feed the Church of God..."*

1 Peter 5:2 *"Feed the flock of God..."*

John 21:15-16 *"Feed my lambs ... feed my sheep"*

Sheep cannot be left on their own without a shepherd to guide, lead, protect and feed them. Sermons should be designed to build up, strengthen and perfect the congregation as a whole and individually.

Ephesians 4:11-12 *"For the perfecting of the saints,...for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

To edify means to build up. Sermons should in a positive way arm their minds against Satan, the influences of this world and their own human nature. They should instruct, exhort, comfort, inspire and correct.

1 Thessalonians 2:11

A loving father desperately wants to see his children succeed and will spare no effort to help them. He won't harangue, rail or beat on them to show who's in charge. 'Exhort' here means to guide, advise, intreat—not to bawl out and rebuke.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 *"...to establish you and comfort you."*

God has set the ministry to continually encourage us along the way. A sermon should not set the ideals and goals so high that they leave the service discouraged and feeling whipped before they begin. This type of sermon can do more harm than good.

Types of sermon to choose

The sermon topic should always be decided according to what the congregation needs and not according to what the minister would like to talk about. Know your congregation. Find out what they need. Be aware of what they are thinking, their problems, weaknesses and trials.

2 Timothy 4:2 *"Preach the word..."*

Use the Bible as the basis for all sermons. We must never go to it to get sanction for our own ideas. We must think deeply about the application of God's Word to us personally so we can show members how to apply it to their own lives.

Paul even tells us how to use God's Word in sermons:

2 Timothy 3:16 *"All scripture is...profitable for doctrine..."*

There are basic doctrinal subjects that need to be covered regularly in sermons.

Hebrews 5:12

Hit the ABC's of doctrine hard. Paul listed these for us in Chapter 6:1-2. Protect God's people against false doctrine by positively preaching on these subjects.

2 Peter 1:2 *"I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things though you know them."*

Never apologize for preaching on basic doctrine. People need it more than we realize. If we neglect this duty, they will forget.

1 Timothy 4:16

Satan has launched repeated attacks against the doctrine of the Bible. Be sure you are firmly grounded in the doctrine of Law and Grace—be able to expound it fully. He has traditionally twisted this one around to undermine the obedience and faith of people.

Jude 5 *“I will put you in remembrance, though you once knew this...”*

Repetition fixes these basic doctrines firmly in our minds.

2 Timothy 3:16 *“...for reproof, for correction.”*

Reproof and correction are different. Correction simply means to straighten up—not to rebuke. People often have false concepts about God and His Law that need correcting. This should always be done positively and never in a negative way. Never use ridicule or sarcasm when correcting a misunderstanding about what God’s Word teaches.

Reproof is correction that is more pointed. This type of sermon is needed only occasionally when there is a general church problem. Never design a sermon around one or two individuals. Avoid at all costs using the mistakes of one person in such a way that others can identify who you’re talking about. If we must use bad examples, use those from another congregation. If we make someone squirm in his seat and afraid to look up because he knows we’re talking specifically about him, we’ll turn him off. The Bible says go to your brother alone when he needs personal correction.

Don’t preach a strongly corrective sermon without giving positive instruction and encouragement. Avoid letting them leave feeling like dirty dogs or angry at you for picking on them either as a whole or personally.

2 Timothy 3:16 *“...for instruction in righteousness.”*

Show them positively how they can live God’s way of life. Sermons on the family relationship—marriage and child rearing—should be given at least once a year. Show them how to pray effectively, how to fast, how to keep the Sabbath, how to get along with one another. Preach about and illustrate the laws upon which God’s way of life is based.

Titus 3:8

Sell them on the concept that God’s way is the best way. Evaluate the problems, weaknesses and needs of the people and show them how to overcome and obey God. Look for areas where people are more vulnerable and preach on these.

Matthew 24:45 *“to give them meat in due season.”*

Explain the meaning of the seasonal Holy days as they come around. Especially prepare them well in advance for the Passover. People need more than a day or two to really examine themselves and prepare for this. Sometimes three or four sermons may be necessary prior to the Passover.

2 Peter 1:19

Don’t neglect prophecy. They need to have their minds positively oriented toward the future. Be mature and balanced in your approach toward prophecy. Don’t get people so psyched up that they are packing their bags to flee before the next Sabbath.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Help people see more realistically that they are part of a worldwide work. This is the most important concept to get across to them. Make them realize that this is the reason they are called now in this age and not just to receive personal salvation.

Answer the question: “Is this just the work of men?” Their very salvation will depend upon how well they understand and act upon the realization that God has personally called them to do a job—that their financial, moral and spiritual support is essential to fulfilling the greatest commission ever given to a group of human beings.

Help them see that there is one work world-wide. Keep them informed of what’s going on.

John 12:47

Help them feel a personal empathy for the entire world.

Avoid ethnic jokes and ridiculing and decrying the popular whipping boys such as doctors, the doctrines of other denominations, ideologies, philosophies and groups. If we allow ourselves to indulge in this type of sarcasm and ridicule, our members will become cynical toward other people and will never have the respect for or attitude of service toward all people. Mr. Armstrong can’t afford to take sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute because he knows the moment he does so he’ll be prevented from ever serving the other side in the way Jesus wants him to.

Preach the truth in a positive way. We don’t have to argue with or demolish, dismember and ridicule the ideas of others in order to feed the flock of God.

Matthew 5:14

Teach them how to approach the world—that God’s Church has something fantastic to give. Help them come out of the defensive crouch that most of them have been living their lives in so they can begin to serve this world.

Romans 8:18

Get their minds on the Kingdom of God. People can easily get bogged down in the present and forget about the future. Talk about the Family of God and their part in reshaping, restoring and rebuilding this earth from the ashes of a collapsed civilization.

2 Peter 3:14

Help them see the reason for total obedience and faithfulness to God and now against the backdrop of the World Tomorrow and the Family of God.

Proverbs 29:18

Our duty is to give them vision so they will be determined to withstand the wiles of the Devil, the pulls of the world, their human nature and every trial and hardship that may lie ahead. Prepare them in advance for trials by helping them to see the big picture—the purpose of human life—more clearly.

It can be very effective to preach a series of sermons on a subject over three or four sabbaths. Such a series can greatly increase the chances of the sermons being of permanent value to the congregation. Be sure to finish the series though.

Sermons should form a vital part of a preventative rather than curative program. Make them practical and teach them how to do it.

Gathering material for the sermon

Give yourself time to adequately prepare. Spending time in preparation gives God the opportunity to work with our minds. Sermons prepared upon the spur of the moment or at the last minute seldom have any lasting value and sometimes may be inaccurate. Good sermons take time to prepare. A well prepared sermon is nine-tenths delivered.

John 15:5

Pray for guidance. Ask God to use you to help and serve His people. Ask Him to inspire your mind. Your contact with God is the only source of power from which you may draw. Ask God for the ability to make the subject clear to the congregation.

2 Timothy 2:15

Study the Word of God deeply. Get to know your subject well. Be able to refer to the authority of the Bible for proof and examples.

Keep a note book or idea book in which you write down ideas as they come to you. Some subjects need to be brooded over for weeks or months before they are given. Give concepts time to age and mellow in your mind.

Proverbs 1:20-21

Constantly collect material from many sources—from watching people, children, animals, events and conditions. The personal experience of yourself and others will illustrate, emphasize and verbally underline what the Bible is saying.

Proverbs 22:17

Very few of us have the capacity to think deeply about problems and conditions in the world. Read widely about the ideas, thoughts and conclusions of the great minds of today. They may not have God's Spirit and may not understand the purpose of human life, but they often have a much deeper understanding of conditions and problems than we do.

Proverbs 22:17

Talk to others about your sermon ideas. Get the input of deacons, members, other ministers—they can often add experiences, concepts and examples of their own. Many times this is the only defense we have against bad logic and muddled thinking on our part.

Often members have subjects they would like to see covered. It pays to ask them occasionally.

Draw up a schedule of sermons you know the congregation needs over the following month or two and work through them. Be sure to keep it flexible though there will always be needs you couldn't foresee. It pays to decide definitely on your subject several days to a week in advance. That is the time to review the material you have in your files so your mind can begin to work on it. Capture on paper any ideas that come to you throughout the week. Write them down or you'll forget them. This will also stimulate your mind with more ideas. Don't worry at this stage about organization.

Use reference works

The most useful reference work for preparing sermons is an ordinary concordance. A Crudens Concordance can become a valuable tool when it is marked up and basic key scriptures have been underlined. Also, learn to use the center reference column in your Bible. Study the notes concerning its use in the beginning of the Bible. Some center reference systems are better than others for general sermon preparation. A

handy expanded reference system is the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. If you have one and find it useful, begin to mark it up as you use it and its value will be greatly increased.

Other translations are undoubtedly the third most valuable tool. Probably the best one to acquire first is the Revised Standard Version. Be careful, however, where a particular translation gives a new twist to a passage and seems to bring out new understanding. Compare the passage with other translations. If none of the others bears out this new twist, the chances are it is subjective judgment on the part of the translator. The December 1973 Good News gives a good run-down on translations and how to use them.

Occasionally you may need to or wish to refer to the meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek. Be conscious of your own limitations and be very careful about drawing dogmatic or sweeping conclusions from a superficial study of a word or text in the original language. Often a study of the Hebrew or Greek adds nothing to what can be found in the standard English translations. Anything special in the original text will usually be found in some English translation.

It's dangerous to look down a list of definitions in a lexicon, pick one that fits your particular theory, and proceed from there. Just because a word 'can mean' something, doesn't prove that it 'does mean' that in the verse you want to use. Many of the original words have as great a variation of meanings as some of our English words and the meaning can only be established by the context. Doctrine must never be decided solely on the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words, it is established by context and by clear passages, not by obscure meanings in doubtful passages.

The best reference works on Greek and Hebrew for the average minister would be the Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament and the Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament. For those who are so inclined and wish to study more deeply into the Greek, the most authoritative reference work is the Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature or, perhaps, an abridged version by Gingrich called the Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament. A good companion to these is John R. Alsop's Index to the Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon. A similar work for the Old Testament is the Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Brown, Driver and Briggs. For most of us, however, the two Englishman's concordances would normally suffice. Strong's and Young's concordances are not very good reference works for studying the original language words or texts.

Be super-cautious about saying, "The Greek (or Hebrew) says..." in a sermon. Most times this is unnecessary and serves no great purpose.

Bible commentaries can be helpful at times to stimulate your thinking on a subject or passage and to give background material to individual books of the Bible. Be careful not to rely upon any one single commentary as many are good in some areas of the Bible and not in others. Never preach from a commentary.

Handy one-volume commentaries are The New Bible Commentary, Revised and Peak's Commentary of the Bible. Both Clarke's commentary and Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's commentary are not very reliable because they are very much out of date and of doubtful scholarship.

Bible dictionaries often supply good background to the Bible and the people and conditions it is dealing with. The favorite Halley's Bible Handbook is old, out of date and often very inaccurate—don't quote it for authority in a sermon. The most useful Bible dictionaries would include the New Bible Dictionary in one volume, the Interpreters Bible Dictionary in four volumes, and Hastings Dictionary of the Bible in five volumes. A shorter volume of Hastings is Hastings One Volume Dictionary. Ungers Bible Dictionary is not bad, but is not as good as the others mentioned.

Learn to use an ordinary English language dictionary. Many passages—especially those concerning Law and Grace in Romans—become clearer as we refer to the dictionary definitions of the words the translators have used.

Don't continually use well-worn words. Learn to paint vivid pictures in words by including phrases from books and articles by some of the better modern writers. A Roget's Thesaurus is an invaluable addition to any minister's library—provided he uses it.

Help them understand and remember

Analyze the human mind and its reactions by putting yourself in their shoes. They don't like dull, boring concordance-type sermons that lack any interest or originality of thought or ideas. Any right and proper method we can use to help them understand and remember principles is good.

Use analogies to illustrate the truth.

Romans 1:20

The Bible is full of physical analogies that help us understand spiritual things:

- Character is like gold purified in the furnace of affliction.
- Character is like clay that is beaten, moulded and formed into a beautiful vase and then fired.
- The Holy Spirit is like water—it flows and cleanses.
- The Holy Spirit is like a fire that needs to be stirred up and not quenched.
- The Holy Spirit is like the olive oil used to light the candles in the temple that never went out. It is a soothing and healing agent.
- The Holy Spirit is like wind—invisible, but we can see its effects.
- The Holy Spirit is like a seed that begets us as God's sons.

Other analogies that have been used to help us to understand include:

- Satan broadcasts on a wavelength and the spirit in man turns the human mind into a receiver.
- Human nature is like the force of gravity—we must resist it and it can never be turned off.
- Human nature is like a garbage can—we get a brief look inside at baptism. After that we must sift through it and find out what's making all that smell.

Be on the lookout for any analogy or illustration that can help. Remember, though, analogies should never be used to prove anything. Nor should they be carried to the point where they break down.

Also, popular expressions or song titles can be used to help people remember spiritual principles by hanging the concept on a hook that is already in their minds. Use quotations and examples from the lives and writings of great men and women to illustrate and clarify.

2 Corinthians 11:13

Do everything you can to make the truth simple and easy to understand. Intelligent people are not offended when difficult-to-understand concepts are explained in such a way that everyone can grasp them.

Proverbs 8:8-9

Ask God to help you understand the meaty principles of the Bible more deeply. Study them in depth. Study for understanding.

Proverbs 2:3-5

It takes a great deal of effort to gain deep insight and understanding of the principles upon which God's Law and His way of life are based. Some ministers have studied through the whole or great portions of the Bible just to gain understanding of one concept. Be willing to put forth the effort.

Matthew 13:23

The fruit of their lives will depend not upon the knowledge they receive, but on the understanding you are able to impart to them. Ask God for the ability to teach and explain these things to them.

A common teaching principle

Realize people generally have great difficulty drawing principles out of Biblical examples and applying Biblical principles to their lives. One method used successfully by teachers to get principles across to people is to give one or two examples, then draw the principle out of the examples in such a way that it is obvious to everyone. They must be able to see the same principle in each of the illustrating examples. Next, take the same principle, after carefully stating it or rewording it so they grasp it, and show how it applies in practical, every-day situations. Learn to illustrate principles in this way for them and they'll understand a lot more easily.

Final organization

Leave the final organization for as late in the week as you comfortably can. This will ensure your subject is fresh in your mind and not just down in your notes. It's difficult to preach a successful sermon from old notes—it must come from within and be a part of us. If you are repeating an old sermon given elsewhere, then it pays to make it a set of fresh notes Friday evening or Sabbath morning.

The S.P.S.

Preparation for a sermon should follow the same step-by-step sequence described for a sermonette, beginning with the S.P.S. When people know where the subject is going, they feel more secure and can follow the train of thought much easier. Do not, however, give the answer or solution at the outset of your sermon.

The body

As with a sermonette, the bulk of the material gathered needs to be pruned down to fit the S.P.S. Avoid trying to squeeze too much into one sermon.

Develop the sermon in order to create suspense and hold interest. Wherever possible, create a story flow so there is a logical connecting theme throughout the sermon. Each point must have a definite connection to the previous one. Avoid enumerating the points, though: i.e. "point one ... point two ... point three" as this is not the way to create the interest and suspense a sermon needs in order to build up to a climax at the end.

Don't just read scripture after scripture/ Weave the scriptures together with an obvious theme. Expound them. Show the full meaning as it applies to your sermon. This helps the congregation understand and shows them how to study their own Bibles. Complete the train of thought—don't digress and leave them hanging in midair.

Watch your logic. Make sure the sermon is logical—that the facts presented are really facts, the proof you offer is really proof and that you're not breaking the basic laws of logic. The two most common errors of logic in sermons are: 1) reasoning from a false premise; and 2) making sweeping generalizations. Both of these result from a failure to get the facts. In the first instance, the facts are ignored. In the second, we start from one or two facts and go from there. An excellent book to own and study is Guides to Straight Thinking, by Stuart Chase (Published by Harper and Row, New York, 1956).

Prove your points and subject fully. Show the importance of the subject throughout the entire sermon and make it apply to their lives personally. Make sure they get the connection with their lives. It often pays to repeat your S.P.S. at least two or three times throughout the sermon in the form of a question or reworded differently each time to remind them of where they are going and to hold their interest in the subject.

Build a forceful conclusion

The conclusion is the most important part of the entire sermon. Build up to a natural climax with the material that has the greatest impact on them. The whole organization of the sermon should lead and build up to this final point which should normally contain an emotional appeal for them to do something about what they'll be listening to.

There may be a number of places in the sermon where you will have used greater intensity and power to stress a point, but the conclusion must have the greatest impact in thought and in intensity. This is the only time you should use sustained intensity and power. They should know you are concluding. Then once you have hit the concluding climax, don't ruin it by continuing to talk. Finish and sit down!

Prepare an interest-grabbing introduction

Again, the introduction is the last part of the sermon you should prepare. Make sure it fits the general theme of the sermon. Remember, we may have captive audiences, but we don't have captive minds. Never take the audience for granted. Capture their interest right from the start. Arouse suspicion. Pose a question. Present a challenge. Use an interesting illustration. Have something that makes them want to listen from the very start. Be sure the introduction leads logically into the S.P.S. and the rest of the sermon. The introduction should attract attention to the subject—never to itself.

Some points on sermon delivery

The delivery of a sermon should always be natural. Never try to imitate the personality or delivery style of another minister or your audience will think you're phony. Develop your own style after the general pattern of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's example.

Start out calmly. Warm up to your audience and give them the time to get used to you and warm up to you. Be friendly. Use humor, but be sparing. The purpose of a sermon is not to entertain. Never use sarcasm—there's no faster way of turning an audience off. Sarcasm humiliates—it attacks the ego and human beings can't take it. Sarcasm directed toward outside groups or individuals is also wrong—don't resort to it.

Become excited about your subject. Use intensity naturally.

Proverbs 27:17

If we are excited then they will be excited too. Our audience will never be more excited about our subject than we are.

There should be high and low levels in the sermon. Learn to fluctuate the voice and delivery. There are times when increased power and intensity are necessary to emphasize and verbally underscore a point. Don't, however, resort to shouting or being bombastic thinking that volume and loudness represent sincerity, the power of the Spirit and authority from God. An audience will usually be able to tell when lots of volume is being used as a compensation for lack of substance. There's no need to terrify the janitor down the hallway every time we speak. Speak to the congregation, not at them.

We must avoid putting ourselves on a pedestal by using the pronoun 'you' all the time — e.g. "You people must have this problem and YOU had better change!" Include yourself. Use 'we' instead of 'you'. Let them know that we are all fighting the same battles.

Be sure to emphasize scripture whenever it is being read from the Bible. That is the sole source of our authority. It's not the best normally to wade through half a chapter of verses to get the background or context. Fill it in for them by paraphrasing it in modern English so you can really emphasize the verse or passage you want. Then place emphasis on the correct words in each passage. Pause for 3 to 5 seconds after long impressive statements to let the full meaning sink into their minds. This latter applies to both scripture readings and our own delivery.

If possible, have another minister, your wife or a close friend evaluate your delivery and message. They can watch for things that should and can be improved like slurring words, speaking too fast, etc.

Above all, pray for God to use you in delivering your sermon.

Proverbs 3:6

Unless God is working through us, we can't accomplish anything worthwhile and permanent. This is more important than anything else we do.

A sermon should normally be planned to go 1 hour to 1 hour 5 minutes. We are deceiving ourselves if we feel we can hold an audience for any longer than this. Except in very rare circumstances, 1 hour 15 minutes is the absolute maximum.

Visiting

Our personal appearance and cleanliness will have a definite effect on our visiting. We need to make sure we bathe or shower at least once every day. Use a good underarm deodorant and a change of underwear every day. Keep your clothes clean and pressed and shoes polished. Socks should be long enough to cover the calf of the leg and tone in with our clothing. Wear mature and conservative clothes for visiting that are in good taste in the area you belong to. Avoid black (except at funerals where may offend people if you don't wear a black suit or at least a black tie). Colorful ties can help brighten up our appearance and mild colors that blend with one another are generally the best.

Watch your grooming and keep nails and hands clean. Sometimes it is necessary to use a good dandruff remover.

Our purpose is to set as good an example as possible and to leave the right impression as the representatives of Jesus Christ and Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong.

Avoid calling anyone after 9.00 p.m. except on very rare occasions and then only by prior arrangement.

Why visit members?

A. To feed the flock of God

Sermons are a vital part of feeding the flock, but sermons are not all the average member needs. They won't hear everything they need to know personally in sermons. Where vital knowledge is contained only in sermons, they may have to wait months for what they need to hear immediately.

John 21:15-17

Visiting is the other part of properly feeding the flock. We can't adopt a 'take it or leave it' or, 'the blood's on their heads' approach to God's people. Sermons are only half of the feeding they need. Without our visiting and personal contact with the flock, a minister will never really know what the congregation needs even in sermons.

John 10:3

Unless a minister gets to know the people personally by name, he can't do an effective job of feeding them.

John 10:14 *"I know...my sheep and am known of mine"*

This shows a close personal relationship. If the minister knows the members and their problems, he can tailor sermons to their need and also back his sermons up by proper, productive visiting.

Proverbs 27:23 *"Be diligent to know the state of your flocks".*

The only way to do this is to get to know them personally through visiting.

Jeremiah 23:1-2

God's way is to visit the members of the Church, instruct, encourage and inspire them. People need encouragement a lot more than we often realize. Some have tremendous burdens as a result of antagonistic, unconverted mates. They need love and concern and a great deal of personal encouragement. If we are going to win their love, we must first extend that love ourselves. No matter who we are called upon to talk with, we must express sincere love, friendship and outgoing concern.

Acts 20:20

Paul visited on an individual basis to ensure they had the spiritual food they needed.

1 Peter 5:2-3

We're not there to spy on them, but to serve. We can't live their lives for them, but we must teach them how to live their lives for themselves.

B. To perfect the saints

Very few members will change as a result of hearing sermons only. Visiting provides a tremendous opportunity to help people apply sermons to their lives. Sermons and visiting must go hand-in-hand. Many of the basic problems such as child-rearing and marriage problems are almost impossible for the individual to solve for himself. They need personal guidance and direction.

Teach them how to overcome through sermons and show them how to overcome through proper visiting.

Ezekiel 34:4

We can't do this from the pulpit only. God calls the spiritually weak, sick and diseased. Our job is to strengthen and help heal them.

Ephesians 4:12

This involves more than instructing, encouraging and inspiring them. It means working with them and helping them overcome their problems and their human nature. Sermons offer a unique opportunity to soften up the resistance human nature throws up and visiting enables the minister to tailor the message of the sermon to the individual on a more personal level. Sermons and visiting must go hand-in-hand. The minister who preaches the sermons should be the one who visits the flock. Take time to get to know them and build rapport.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

Some have pretty tough trials after baptism. Be sure to visit them within two weeks and again within another month. This not only helps them over spiritual pitfalls, but is an excellent time to build the type of rapport with them that will form the basis of a working relationship later on.

Proverbs 10:5

As ministers we can't afford to run a spiritual ambulance service all the time. Our visits must be part of a positive, preventative program in helping people overcome and not a curative one. If we wait around for people to call us when they need help, we'll find the calls will come few and far between and when we do get them, things will be so serious they will often be almost irreparable.

We must help people fight their human nature and overcome it. Only with personal help can we show them how to change wish-bones into back-bones. Don't make the decisions—teach them how to make decisions for themselves.

We can prepare people's minds for visits through sermons in such a way that they look forward to and expect the type of help they need. Preach sermons that show why visiting is necessary and stress how much they need a minister's help. Our approach in sermons and Bible studies is important. Be open with them and they'll be open with you. Do they look on us as one perched on a pinnacle of near perfection with one foot already in the Kingdom of God? If so, they'll feel we can't help or won't understand them.

Be willing with discretion to open up your life and show, as Paul did, that we are touched with the similitude of their afflictions! Let them see we are fighting ourselves and have had to learn lessons from the school of hard knocks. If they feel 'he's one of us', they'll relate to you.

Let them know with concern, warmth and compassion that you know they have problems. Help them realize you understand they don't want to keep those problems. Teach them God has placed His ministers in His Church to help them overcome their problems and that overcoming involves counseling with the minister. Show them God's way is not the 'do it yourself' approach. Sell them on the value of being open. Teach them that the only thing they have to lose by being open is their problems.

Help them understand that they're not in trouble when the minister finds out—they're in trouble when they sin. The purpose of the ministry is to get them out of trouble and the first step to getting out of trouble is to seek help.

People need to realize that whatever they tell us will be kept in confidence—that we won't tell our wives that night or use their problems in a sermon so others can figure out who it is. NEVER betray a confidence or people won't be open with you.

Go back over and review the step-by-step approach in the section on preparation for leadership. This is the type of positive teaching they need personally and through sermons.

1 Corinthians 3:13

This is talking about the work of the ministry. Our reward will be tied in closely with the type of job we do with God's people. Continual superficial and social visits all the time will build in wood and hay and stubble. And so will snooping, prying and interfering ones. We can't piggy-back members into the Kingdom. Some ministers have baby-sat members when they should have been showing them how to stand on their own two spiritual feet. Don't run their lives for them, but patiently, gently, lovingly show them how to make their own decision and how to study, how to pray, how to grow.

The pressures on members from their human natures and the world are awesome. Human nature is often more powerful than God's Spirit in their lives. Teach them how to use God's Spirit. The word 'minister' means 'servant'—serve them by being a friend and confidant and advisor and help in their time of need.

Never brow-beat or get angry at them when they make a mistake and sin.

Titus 3:2-5

The only one who has the right to take sin personally is Jesus Christ and he is willing to endure every suffering and problem and pressure in order to see the members come through.

2 Timothy 2:24-25

Deal kindly with people. Meekness means being approachable, easily entreated, willing to listen to their side of the story. Never ride in with your spurs on, or become angry, irritated and annoyed because of something said about yourself. You may have to take an awful lot of guff off people before you can begin to serve them. A person's attitude may not be right, but we need to analyze why it is not right. It could be a result of our own approach.

2 Corinthians 10:8

Authority is something that should be there, but be used only very rarely and never to demolish or tear down an individual. Authority is to build them up and help them grow.

1 Timothy 5:1

Be careful and discreet with older people. Respect their age, experience and knowledge and they'll respect you.

Isaiah 50:4

Be patient and gentle, encouraging and kind. Don't ruin someone through lashing out at them in the type of correction that is cruel and unnecessary.

Proverbs 28:13

Constantly remind them that the minister is there to get them out of trouble and not into it. Show them they are in trouble when they sin. Sell them on this concept and visiting will become more productive. Help them understand a visit is a workshop situation in which they and the minister together attack their greatest enemy—their own human nature.

Romans 7:16-17, 22-24

Realize people are victimized by their human nature. Help them to see and understand this or they'll defend, justify and cover up the real enemy from themselves and from you.

A complete ministry must have visiting as a vital part of it. It takes personal contact to give sermons their full effectiveness. The members' attitude toward the minister definitely affects their attitude toward what's being said in a sermon. He must be their friend. His life must be involved and bound up in seeing them grow.—and they must know and see and feel it.

Never visit women alone! Occasionally ministers become involved in compromising situations as a result. Also, even when there is such a situation, there is always the possibility of some sort of false accusation being leveled at us. Even in the case of very elderly women there have been accusations concerning wills. Be sure to take someone with you every time—even for anointing someone who is sick.

Handling member problems

The routine member visit is different from the problem member visit. The routine visit is a preventative action designed to positively help the individual grow and overcome human nature and eventually qualify for God's Kingdom. The problem member visit is curative and is necessary when a person has a problem and is either not making progress or is deteriorating and needs help. A big blast from the pulpit is not the way to handle member problems—unless it is a general problem throughout most of the congregation.

If the minister prepares the minds of the congregation positively through sermons and if he has developed the right sort of trust and rapport through visiting, many people will come to him with their problems. These members can be helped and progress made in most cases.

The minister can't allow problems to smolder away in the Church hoping they will disappear. Problems must be dealt with in a positive way. They usually get worse if nothing is done. Those that need immediate attention include problems such as adultery, drinking too much or outright drunkenness, serious financial problems, unusual marriage or child rearing problems, serious attitude problems, heresy, and demon and drug problems. Many of these problems become obvious through visiting, others surface during periods of crises in the life of the individual when, in sheer desperation, he or someone else comes to the minister. Sometimes they just stop attending.

Occasionally, you'll learn about problems through others.

Proverbs 25:8-12

People generally resent other members going directly to the minister about their problems. Another member can often encourage a brother to go to the minister himself with his problem. Teach them the principle of going to one another alone in your sermons. Teach them balance—we don't want members spying on one another, but we don't want them breaking this law either. Don't forget about the problem. Follow it up if necessary with the individual who first came to you to see if he did go. Then you may have to go yourself.

On this type of visit it is often not wise to take your wife with you—except with marriage and child rearing problems. Firstly, they will often be reluctant to talk and, secondly, it will tend to fill your wife's mind with things that she would be better off not knowing about.

Don't beat about the bush with the individual. Don't just talk, hoping the problem will 'come out in the conversation'—they rarely do. Explain with love and compassion that you understand that there may be a problem and ask if there is anything you can do to help.

Proverbs 18:13

Avoid jumping to conclusions, assuming that what you've heard or observed is the truth. Listen to their side of the story.

Galations 6:1

Meekness means an approachable, easily entreated attitude of mind that is ready to listen. Consider yourself—ask God for a deep compassion toward those who make mistakes and have to pay the penalty for them.

Don't confuse being soft-headed with being soft-hearted. Don't condone the problem. Be down on the problem—not the individual.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

Help them to see that it is those who overcome who will be in the Kingdom. Try to show them they can't afford to coexist with their problem. Show the advantages of overcoming. Make them realize there's no such thing as a hopeless case so long as they want to overcome.

1 Corinthians 12:26

Try to get them to realize how much their problem is adversely affecting the Body of Christ and its ability to do a job—that a member of the Body can't keep pumping poisons into the bloodstream without it affecting the whole Body.

The first problem visit is not the time to use strong correction. We are not there as Christ's policemen to see that everyone obeys His Law. We must be willing to serve them—even pray with them if necessary, in order to get them started again. Some ministers have even gone around at 6 a.m. to help get alcoholic members out of bed and pray with them before they go to work because they have asked for the help they have needed to get them back on their spiritual feet again.

Encourage them to work out their own solution to their problems. Help them modify it if necessary by asking leading questions. If it is their solution, they are more likely to put it into practice.

Proverbs 17:17

Explain to them that many people have been helped by ringing the minister at regular intervals to let him know how they're getting on with a serious problem. The frequency would depend on the problem and its seriousness. The length of time involved is up to them. When they feel they're on their feet again, they can stop calling. Just the fact that they know another human being knows and is concerned will often encourage them to try.

Work first of all on their attitude toward their problem. Let them know they can ring you anytime day or night when they need help or feel tempted to give in. Also, give them time to work on the problem and change—don't crowd them unless you'll be back in a short while to visit them again. Be sure you do return when you said you would.

If on the second visit, their attitude toward their problem hasn't changed, go through it with them again. Find out how much of their solution they have actually put into practice. Above all, help them to understand the position they're in in their relationship with God. Don't read the riot act, be patient and firm. Encourage them to try. Remember, we can't live their lives for them. We can only tell them what God's Word says and encourage them to live by it. Our job is not to judge or condemn or punish them—it is to serve and help, encourage and correct them.

Luke 13:1-9

Their ultimate judge will be Jesus Christ and they can't play games with Him. However, a great deal of patience and hard work is necessary to help people who aren't changing. The owner of the vineyard here wasn't being ruthless—the tree had been growing there for years. According to the Law, the first three years' fruit was to fall on the ground, the next was to go to the Levites and this was the third year he could have expected fruit for himself. The parable is to show us how patient Christ is as the dresser of the vineyard. Remember the fig tree in this case was not adversely affecting the other trees in the vineyard.

When to disfellowship

If a minister is properly discharging his duty, it will be rare for him to have to put someone out of the Church. However, some sins will affect others in the Church unless they are dealt with swiftly and, occasionally, the minister needs the tool of disfellowshipping to help an individual who is either in a wrong attitude or unrepentant or won't change.

Disfellowshipping should always be carried out by the minister in charge of the area.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Here the fornicator had not repented and his sin was having an adverse affect upon the Church as a whole. Paul put him out to help him realize the seriousness of the situation he was in—to help him repent “that the spirit might be saved”—and in order to protect the Church.

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

Disfellowshipping shows the unrepentant member that the Church will not condone sin that is not repented of and that will bring reproach upon the Church.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-14

In this case there were members who were downright lazy, living as leeches upon the efforts of others and they weren't prepared to change. Paul commanded them to be disfellowshipped for their own good—“that he might not be ashamed” and repent and change.

Disfellowshipping is not a punishment. It is a tool that God has placed in the hands of the ministry for helping the individual and protecting the flock. Never disfellowship for a sin or some action by the individual. If a person's attitude toward his sin is right and he wants help and is trying to overcome, he should not be disfellowshipped. People need to be taught that if they come to us seeking help then, no matter how bad the problem, they won't be disfellowshipped.

Their attitude will not always be right to start off with. Work with the attitude. Give them every opportunity to change.

Matthew 18:15-17

The principle here is that we must be willing to go to them alone—at least twice to try to help them. Don't be trigger-happy. Use disfellowshipping as a last resort to help them or protect the Church—not to cop out of the responsibility of helping people with problems you can't or won't or are afraid to handle. Never disfellowship in order to get even with someone or because you're upset over some mistake they have made or sin they have committed. Pray about your attitude—the whole purpose of going to your brother is to “gain your brother.”

Proverbs 29:1

Sometimes an individual won't change his attitude and it is becoming obvious that further talking will do little or no good. If an individual is not repentant after you have worked with his attitude, then he should be disfellowshipped for his own good. Disfellowship for attitude. It's not showing mercy to a baptized member to allow him to stay in fellowship with the Church while he is unrepentant and won't change.

Proverbs 18:19

Never read the riot act to them. Don't do anything that will set their attitude toward you or the Church in concrete. Let them know in love that what you're

doing is for their good and that you'll call by and visit with them if they'll allow it. Make sure they understand why they're being disfellowshipped and what they need to do to return. Leave the door open and make the way back as easy as possible by letting them know we're for them and want to see them return to the Church.

Even when a rotten, critical, foul attitude is being displayed, the minister should let the individual know that if there is any way he can help, they should feel free to contact him.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

We must teach the Church what their attitude toward a disfellowshipped member should be. When someone is disfellowshipped it is often wise to mention in an announcement that so-and-so won't be attending for a while, that the reasons are none of their concern, but the individual is.

This is showing a lot more mercy toward the disfellowshipped member than saying nothing and having people ring him up to invite him over for cards, so placing him in the position where he has to tell the Church individually as member after member contacts him.

Provided the person is not a heretic or rabble-rouser, this is an ideal time for a minister to explain to the congregation that a disfellowshipped member is not a spiritual leper or an enemy of some kind—that they should be friendly when they meet him in some street or supermarket, enquire after his well-being and let him know that they'd all like to see him back and are praying for him. Teach them it's not wrong to drop him a note to encourage him and tell him they're praying for his return. Explain, however, that they shouldn't fellowship with him, invite him into their homes or eat with him.

Matthew 18:10-14

Be sure to visit the person within a month to encourage him. There's no need for probation periods—once he has repented invite him back. If you're in doubt as to whether he has fully repented, it's wise to err on the side of mercy. Be willing to continue to work with him if he hasn't repented—if his basic attitude will allow it.

2 Corinthians 2:6-8

When he's ready to return it's wise not to invite him to the very next Sabbath service. Invite him to the following one and use the next service to announce to the Church that he's going to return next week. Encourage them to welcome him in a right way—let him know they're pleased to see him return. If we don't do this, he'll run into attitudes all the way from outright hostility through suspicion to jubilation. Be sure to educate the members on what their attitude and approach should be.

When to mark

Romans 16:17-18

Whenever there is someone spreading dissension, the minister must move swiftly or the Church will suffer. Be careful to distinguish between the wolf in sheep's clothing and the poor, confused sheep who need help. If they're causing trouble, spreading heresy, dissension or a critical attitude, we must get them out to protect the flock and, if necessary, publicly mark them to warn the congregation against trying to contact them.

Before marking anyone, seek legal advice. It's often wise to just read a statement out from the pulpit that has been checked over by a solicitor beforehand.

Titus 3:10-11

Once again, the principle is to talk twice and then take action to protect the flock. In serious cases, both admonitions can take place on the same visit. Don't let wolves hang around the flock to devour them. If they're not willing to keep quiet, then they must sort out their own problems outside the Church.

Don't let a wolf in sheep's clothing back into the Church until you're absolutely sure he has repented and changed and is no longer a wolf.

1 Timothy 1:19-20

Never lose sight of the fact that our job is to keep people in the Church and that disfellowshipping is a tool to be used wisely and sparingly as a last resort. Pray for wisdom, guidance and love beforehand. Always act out of concern for the individual and the Church—never out of personal prejudice or feelings.

Befriending unconverted mates

Marriages with an unconverted mate offer a special problem that needs special attention. Often, the longer the one mate has been in the Church the more the marriage has deteriorated. Many of our more serious marriage and legal problems have arisen in unconverted mate situations because the unconverted mate has been either neglected, turned off or totally mishandled by the member-mate. Adverse publicity has not been unusual.

There has been a tendency, especially where the converted mate is the wife, to visit when the other mate is not around. There are certain advantages in this, but the disadvantages often outweigh the advantages. The unconverted mate tends to resent the secrecy, looks upon the Church as exclusivist and feels it is driving a wedge between them. This can create serious problems—especially when the unconverted mate has for years had a distorted view of our teachings from the actions of his or her mate. Sometimes the woman, if she is the one in the Church, will use the Church as a bludgeon against her husband—judging and condemning him.

1 Peter 3:1

Women with unconverted husbands need special instructions on how to handle their mates and how to be a proper wife to him. This instruction can be given in sermons and personally after services. Men with unconverted wives also need similar instruction. They both need it more than those where both mates are in the Church.

Right from the outset at the first visit, try to visit them both together. If this is an initial visit, it is the best time to start. If you are the new minister in the area, you have an excellent opportunity to call around on a social visit—"I just happened to be in the area and thought I'd drop in to make your acquaintance." Choose a time when you know you'll find both of them home.

Go out of your way to befriend the one who is unconverted or who doesn't seem interested in the Church. A minister can always explain the teachings of the Church in a such a more favorable light and in a more palatable way than the interested or converted mate can.

Always answer the questions of the unconverted mate—don't hedge around. Often problems begin to dissolve when the mate realizes we are open and have nothing to hide.

Wherever you can, invite the couple around to your home for a meal or social evening together. Spend time really getting to know the unconverted mate. They are often surprised to find out we're not some weird mob who can talk about nothing but religion all the time. They'll often realize for themselves that they have been getting a distorted picture of the Church from their mates.

Make them welcome at services if they want to come. Sometimes the unconverted mate has let them know that they would not be welcome there. Extend special invitations to them to social occasions. Let them know we're interest in their welfare and want to serve them as well.

Our wives can cultivate the friendship of unconverted wives and go shopping with them, have them over for coffee mornings and help in whatever way they can. Whenever an unconverted wife attends services for the first time with her converted husband, see that she is the one who gets the flowers to take home afterward.

If the unconverted mate is the husband, try to get together with him on social occasions or invite him on a fishing trip or recreational or sporting activity.

Some ministers have made a point, with great success, of visiting all the unconverted mates to see if there is anything we can do to help. Hostilities have disappeared and some have begun attending as a result. They have also encouraged the wife to ask her husband if he would mind her being baptized when she has begun to counsel for it. This shows the husband that we respect his feelings and position as head of the family.

Don't neglect these people. Time spent with them is well worth it in the long run.

Counseling for baptism

Be very careful about who you baptize and when. It is best to be cautious and go very slow. Make sure you've taken the time to get to know them, their background, religious experience, and how they came in contact with us.

Don't counsel people for baptism in groups. Spend time with each one individually. Their very salvation is involved. Find out if they have ever approached one of God's ministers before about baptism. Why weren't they baptized then? Don't proceed until you're satisfied. Phone or write the minister involved if necessary.

How much knowledge is required before baptism?

Repentance is not based on knowledge. Satan has knowledge but he's not ready for baptism.

Matthew 28:19-20

The doctrines and commandments and way of life are to be taught after baptism. However, they must know what sin is and they must understand the sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 11:6

Are they totally convinced God does exist, that the Bible is His inspired Word and that this is God's Church? Have they really proven it for themselves? Spend time on this with second-generation Christians who grew up in the Church.

Romans 14:1-6

They don't have to be perfect. The Sabbath is the test commandment though. There's only one reason anyone would begin keeping the Sabbath—to obey God.

Mr HWA has baptized people who were smoking and eating unclean meats, but whom he knew from their attitudes, would yield to the truth when they came to understand it.

There is no set routine for Baptism counseling, but the following guidelines should help:

Find out why they want to be baptized

People want baptism for various reasons—to be accepted by the Church, to salve a guilt conscience, “because God commands it”, “because it's necessary for salvation”, “so I can receive God's Spirit”. Make sure they understand the right reason for baptism and that they want it for the same reason the Bible says they should want it.

Acts 2:37

These men realized they were under a penalty of death—that they had God's blood on their hands. They needed salvation from death forever. Are they throwing themselves on God's mercy? Is this the reason they want baptism?

Acts 2:38

Baptism is for the remission of sins. The purpose of baptism is not so we can get God's Holy Spirit. It's to wipe away our guilty past, remove the penalty of eternal death. The gift of God's Spirit doesn't even come at baptism. It comes with the laying on of hands following baptism.

Unless an individual understands the purpose of baptism, they probably aren't ready yet. Invariably, they will express a desire for God's Spirit which is a good desire. Explain to them that God can't place His Spirit in an unrepentant mind.

Help them understand the role of the minister

Make them realize that the purpose of coming to the ministry is not to ‘get checked out’ for baptism. Help them to understand that only three people know what they’re thinking and whether or not they’ve repented—God, Jesus Christ and themselves. Show them why God and Christ won’t make the decisions for them—that the ultimate decision to be baptized is theirs!

They must decide, because only they can correctly analyze their minds to see if they’re repentant. The purpose of the ministry is to help them correctly analyze their own mind. We can ask them questions, expound the Biblical passages dealing with baptism, use analogies so they can search their own minds—but the ultimate decision must be theirs.

If we see they’re not ready, we’ll do them the service of telling them, explaining why and what they’ve got to do about it. But we don’t decide for them.

Get them away from the idea that somehow they’ve got to convince us they’re ready. Explain that they are responsible for their own salvation—that we are there to help, serve and advise—that no minister is ever going to make the most important decision in their lives for them.

Have them explain what repentance means to them personally

Most people’s understanding of repentance is superficial. Unless the minister fully understands it and has deeply repented himself, he won’t be able to really help another individual see it and understand it.

Matthew 12:34 *“Out of the abundance of the heart...”*

Get them talking, explaining, expressing themselves. Don’t look for pat answers—look for understanding. Repentance is not knowledge, it is an attitude of mind. People need to know they’ve sinned and had an attitude of hostility towards God’s Way. Has the rebellion against God and His Laws gone? Has he a completely submissive attitude? Does he abhor himself? Is he willing to change in accord with the instruction of the Bible?

The minister must be able to discern their attitude. Ask God for a discerning mind so you can serve them and help them understand.

Why are they sorry?

Are they broken up and sorry? Ask them “Why?” Keep asking “Why?” People are generally sorry because they’ve hurt themselves, hurt others, hurt God. Do they understand who got hurt the most? How have their sins hurt God?

Go through the example of David’s repentance with them. Most people seeking baptism make the mistake of comparing the depth of sorrow they feel with the depth of sorrow David obviously felt. People are different emotionally. Some physically, mentally and psychologically cannot experience the depth of emotion David did. They need to be broken up and sorry for the same reason David was—not necessarily the same amount.

Help them understand why David was sorry. He realized an animal sacrifice wouldn’t wipe out his sins (Psalm 51:16). Who was going to have to pay the penalty? Who was going to get hurt the most? Who was David praying to? His God was the One who was going to have to suffer and bleed and die for what he’d done! David was the one who wrote Psalm 22. He knew what it meant.

Are they sorry and broken up because their sins killed Jesus Christ? Get them to carefully analyze their own mind and compare it with the way the Bible says they

should feel. Remind them the decision must be theirs. Ask them do they really feel deep down they have been sorry for the same reason David was.

If they say “No” or if they express doubt or if they didn’t quite see it that way before, ask them if they want more time to fast and pray about it. It’s not wrong to tell them they need more time, but if they do, try to get them to see it for themselves and make the decision to wait longer for themselves.

Never just tell someone he’s not ready and send him away. This is not more than an exercise in futility for them. If they’re not ready, help them to see it for themselves. Help them to understand. Always explain what they must do.

Do they abhor themselves?

It’s difficult for people to repent of themselves and see the need to bury themselves totally. If they say they feel this way, ask them “Why?” Again, help them analyze their attitude and mind. Ask “Why did you sin?”. Do they really realize they sinned in the past because they wanted to. Let them talk.

Use the example of Job to illustrate what God says their attitude should be. Do they hate themselves because God says they’re evil and deceitful and desperately wicked? Or, can they see it for themselves? There’s a big gap between repenting of what we are because of what God says we are and repenting of what we are because we can see ourselves how rotten, deceitful, filled with vanity, selfishness and greed we are.

Do they really see the need for God’s Spirit and for overcoming? Give them examples and illustrations to compare their minds with. Give them the greatest opportunity to see for themselves if they’re ready or not.

What about fruits?

Matthew 3:8

With brand new people, where you doubt their repentance, you may want to give them time to bring forth the fruit of repentance. The Sabbath is the number one test commandment. You can also use any of the other commandments they may not know about if there is any doubt.

Never let them leave you without their fully understanding why you think they need more time. If there is any doubt in your mind or theirs as to whether or not they’re ready, have them wait. Baptism is an act of faith.

Have they counted the cost?

Luke 14:25-30

Take them through this. Make sure they have counted the cost. Do they realize they have been bought with a price and their life will not be their own?

Explain the meaning of Romans 6:1-15—that baptism is a burial and so far as the Law is concerned, they die with Jesus Christ at baptism and the penalty of the Law is satisfied. After that Christ lives His life in them and they must follow whatever His Spirit and His Word directs.

Help them to understand why they’re being called now

Show them that this is a world-wide Work with the greatest commission ever given to a group of human beings. Teach them that God isn’t calling people now just to give them salvation.

If they don’t see and understand their responsibility to support this great Work mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally—if they want baptism just so they

can have personal salvation—if they don't want to be a part of what God is doing—they're not ready for baptism.

Let them make the final decision

Don't take the decision out of their hands at the end by telling them they're not ready. Ask them if they think they're ready. If it's obvious they are, say to them that you can't see any reason why they shouldn't be baptized. Ask them for their decision. This will help them to realize salvation is between them and God and that they can't play games with Him—that no minister is going to make decisions of faith for them.

Explain the Laying on of Hands to them. Help them to see that the act of baptism also represents their total willingness to submit to God and His personal rule over their lives and that the Laying on of Hands represents the first extension of the government of God through human instruments into their lives—that if they are going to be a part of God's government forever, they must be willing to live under the government now. Show them how the Laying on of Hands invests them personally with the responsibility of doing a job through that government—of being a part of this Work.

The baptism formula

The following is the baptism formula written out years ago by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong for the ministers:

“Have you repented of all your sins?”

“Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?”

“What is your full name?”

“Then (full name) as a result of your repentance, and because you do accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, your Lord and Master, your present High Priest in heaven and your soon-coming King, I now baptize you into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and I do this in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. Amen”

This can be varied slightly or added to slightly when you are baptizing a number of people together and you don't want to sound repetitious. However, all the points given should be mentioned each time you baptize anyone.

Rebaptism for those previously baptized by God's ministers

Be super-cautious about whom you rebaptize and when. Some people become discouraged over their spiritual growth or human weaknesses and decide, on their own, that they do not have God's Holy Spirit. They realize they aren't able to live a perfect Christian life so they feel that their baptism was not valid. Sometimes they will come to this conclusion after a strong sermon that condemns them.

The first thing to determine when someone comes doubting their former baptism is: are they just weak? Do they want an excuse for their sins, weaknesses and shortcoming by saying, "I don't have God's Spirit."?

Ask if they have been praying effectively and regularly. Are they studying the Bible every day? When was the last time they fasted? In many cases, people have become lax in prayer, study and fasting and are not growing as they should. This has nothing to do with their original baptism. It's a matter of their present spiritual condition.

If they're not praying, studying, fasting regularly, don't discuss the subject any further with them until they are and have been doing so for a number of weeks.

There are cases when people didn't really repent and need to be rebaptized. If at all possible, send them back to the same minister who originally baptized them. Always counsel people for rebaptism with another experienced minister present if at all possible.

The key question is whether or not they really understood repentance and had repented before they were baptized. Were they counseled in a group or did the individual spend time by himself being counseled for baptism? Did the minister ask him about his faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior? Make them explain how they felt about repentance. Were there any dramatic changes in their lives prior to baptism when they were preparing for it?

After baptism, what difference did they notice in their relationship with God? Were they able to pray more effectively? Were they able to study more effectively? Did they notice a difference in their ability to overcome basic character weaknesses? Did they feel totally surrendered to God and His Word? Look for the fruits in their life.

If you determine the individual had not repented and needs to be rebaptized, start from scratch and go through the whole baptism procedure. Don't assume that because they've come to a right conclusion about their former baptism, they are now ready to be baptized. Be super-cautious about rebaptizing anybody.. Seek advice from a more experienced minister if you are unsure.