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WINTER 2018

■ FROM THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

Enthusiasm: The Fuel of Your Calling

BY DOUG CLAY

An enthusiastic attitude can fuel us through some of the ups and downs we all face in ministry. It's the joy factor that keeps us focused and committed in our calling when our emotions suggest we quit.

I recently read the following quote from Chuck Swindoll that helped me see the importance of enthusiasm: "In many ways, enthusiasm is the key ingredient that frees us from the cramping, dark, overheated confinement of a task. When the odds are against us, the hours are long, and the end is not yet in view, enthusiasm rescues us from the temptation to quit — or run away — or complain."

Paul knew the value of enthusiasm and the part it plays in staying motivated. He shared it with his young protégé Timothy who was facing his own energy-draining battle. Paul told him to "fan into flame" the powerful gift God had given him (2 Timothy 1:6). That spirit of joy fueled Timothy during one of the toughest stretches of his ministry. And it can do the same for us.

When we become worn down by disappointments in ministry, we too can ask the Holy Spirit to fan into flame the gift that produces a new enthusiasm for the people we serve, the place we minister and the responsibilities He entrusts to us. It's falling in love with ministry all over again.

Fall in Love with the People You Are Called to Serve

In the natural, some people we are called to lead are not that lovable. But God gives us a supernatural capacity and ability to love even the more difficult people. Paul wrote in Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

God loved us when we were completely unlovable. Later in that same chapter, Paul says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

It's that same supernatural demonstration that can baptize us with a spirit of joy to love people again.

There is a big difference between the energy drainers and energy producers in our ministries. But we make a huge mistake if we categorize them and give one group more attention than the other. Why is that? Because everyone has a soul, and God has no categories in eternity.

Fall in Love with the Place Where You Are Called to Minister

Do you ever get the itch to throw in the towel and look for greener pastures somewhere else? It's so common in ministry. But God has planted us where we are, and He intends for us to flourish. When the nation of Israel was ready to take the Promised Land, God told Joshua, "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (Joshua 1:3).

As God directs your steps, He has given you a place for your feet.

My ministry has taken me many places over the years, uprooting me from a city that I loved and moving me to a

The Holy Spirit is eager to renew your enthusiasm, and He's ready to do it daily.

place I may not have chosen. But I quickly realized that if I didn't fall in love with the place and have enthusiasm for the geographical area where God sent me, it could have negative consequences.

We can feel out of place sometimes in ministry. But resist the temptation to feel trapped. Ministry in rural areas is different than ministry in urban settings. Not

only is there a Columbus, Ohio, with a university and thriving metropolitan area, there's also a Hicksville, Ohio, with a population under 4,000. What will work in one place won't always work elsewhere. Recognizing the difference will keep you in tune with what God wants you to do and the valuable opportunity each place affords.

To do this, you need cultural literacy, which is much more effective than cultural relevance. We should understand the unique place we've been called to reach, and then find ways to minister effectively. When we are baptized in the joy of the Holy Spirit, we can be enthusiastic about any setting God has us in. Seriously, take some time to ask God to help you fall in love with the place where you are ministering.

(continued on page 4)

Storms Reveal What Matters Most

BY KAY BURNETT

You don't have to live very long to realize that storms are always raging around us. Both literal and figurative storms are guaranteed to show up in our lives. Whenever something is guaranteed, wisdom tells us to accept it, even embrace it. Otherwise we set ourselves up for disappointment and disillusionment. Storms will come. If we fail to accept this fact, we'll be tempted to react to the storms of life with anger and discouragement.

Yes, storms will come, but as Christ-followers, we don't face them alone — ever. Jesus promised: "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace. In the world you have tribulation and distress and suffering, but be courageous [be confident, be undaunted, be filled with joy]; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, AMP).

As Paul and his companions continued their journey toward Rome, the voyage became increasingly dangerous. When their ship was overtaken with gales and hurricane-force winds (Acts 27:7–14), Paul warned the leaders on the ship that great danger lay ahead of them if they chose to continue sailing. He spoke from the experience of one who had survived many storms, both at sea and in his personal life: "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea" (2 Corinthians 11:25). Paul had already survived three shipwrecks! He knew the signs of an impending storm.

What helped the apostle Paul be strong in the storms of life? Why are some people able to overcome fear and intimidation in the storms, revealing a supernatural peace and strength? I propose that two concepts offer a simple, yet profound explanation: proximity and surrender.

When his journey brought extreme pressures through physical suffering and trials, the apostle Paul pressed in to a closer proximity to his beloved Savior, drawing into deeper places of knowing

God and worshipping Him. He honored Him, loved Him, and trusted Him through the worst of times. Paul surrendered, bowing himself in total release and acceptance of all that the journey entailed, as he relied on God for the strength and peace to endure.

Storms have a way of revealing our true character. Hard times strip away all pretense to reveal what we are made of. Under pressure, what is inside will come out. Squeeze a tube of toothpaste, and toothpaste will come out.

It doesn't matter if you want something else to come out; the only thing that will come out is what is inside the tube. What is inside us will come out under pressure. Sometimes the stuff squeezed out doesn't glorify God and bless others; we find we are filled with the wrong stuff. Good or bad, godly or disappointing, what is inside needs to come out, making room for fresh truth, revelation, and strength for what lies ahead.

The only way to have the right stuff come out under pressure is to put the right stuff in.

What fills our minds, hearts, and spirits? What things do we permit in the core of our being? Are they life-giving, worthy of the only life we have to live here on earth, or are they just junk food, which might taste good to our sinful and selfish selves but leave us feeling empty and dissatisfied? We need to drink deeply of God's Word. We need to spend time in His presence so He can speak to our hearts and fill our minds with His truth.

The only way to have the right stuff come out under pressure is to put the right stuff in. The right stuff is God's truth, God's love, God's presence, God's grace, God's wisdom, God's peace — in other words, everything God offers to us through an active relationship with Him. Becoming a new creation when we accept Christ as our Savior is both an instantaneous work and an ongoing work of transformation. We are immediately a new creation, but our lives need to be transformed and shaped into His image every day. He promises that this will happen as we draw close to Him and live

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completely for Him. Transformation in Christ requires our active surrender to His ways and His will. The more we surrender to Him, the more we are filled with His holiness, His righteousness, and His love for others.

However, some storms that hit us are so dark and unexplainable there are no easy answers to our questions. In these types of storms, overcoming and victory can be a long hard journey, filled with days of great struggle. In those seasons, victory looks a lot like just being willing to stay with Jesus, not run. Overcoming involves tears and silent cries for rescue that become our prayers. Only in pouring out our pain and anguish can we gain the capacity to feel hope again. He doesn't ask that we strive to look good. He doesn't ask that we work harder and harder to be good. He invites us to draw close and let Him surround us with His loving arms and unchangeable devotion.

God offers incomparable peace and strength to all who draw near to Him and surrender to Him. We don't have to will ourselves to want to do His will. We don't have to obey Him and draw near to Him with our own strength. He promises to do this for us: "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

What a relief! Having the right life doesn't depend on my being good enough, strong enough, holy enough, or obedient enough. Having the right life comes through receiving what we need from God. We press in closer and closer to Him, surrendering and following Him into anything He asks.

Since we all experience situations that expose what's inside us, we would be wise to view the revelation as a gift, one that provides an opportunity to confess where we fall short and miss the mark. When we go to the Lord and pour out our hearts to Him in honesty, telling Him how we have failed, it's like pouring out a glass full of something bitter and unhealthy. The emptied glass can be filled up with what we need most — what heals and fulfills — His presence and His truth. If we fill up on Him, He can draw out what we need when we need it. When the storm hits my life, what is my response? To whom do I listen? What actions do I take?

Hard as I try, I will never travel my journey perfectly, but as I obey God I can take the right direction and travel in the right way. The ability to live my best life comes through spending time with God and reading His Word. We have often heard, "What you feed will grow. What you starve will die." It's a simple principle, and true to the core. Might that be true in our spiritual lives, as well? If we starve the things that hold us back and leave us empty, such as sinful words and actions, we lessen their strength and ease their grip. The less we focus time and effort on the wrong things, the more we can focus on good and godly things that will help us survive and thrive in the storms of life.



Kay Burnett is national director of Women's Ministries for the Assemblies of God. This article is adapted from her book, Voyage: Trusting Jesus in Uncharted Waters (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2017).

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Falling in Love with How God Has Shaped You to Meet the Responsibilities of Your Calling

God has created you to meet each unique challenge you face. When we are baptized with the joy of who we are in Christ, we see our responsibilities as blessings instead of burdens. But if we begin to compare our ministry to someone else's, we run the risk of never matching up to what God has for us.

Comparison erodes the value of God's workmanship. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that "we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

If you tamper with His handiwork, how He made you to meet your responsibilities, it can short circuit the good works He has set in front of you. Give your Creator credit for perfectly placing you where your talents work best!

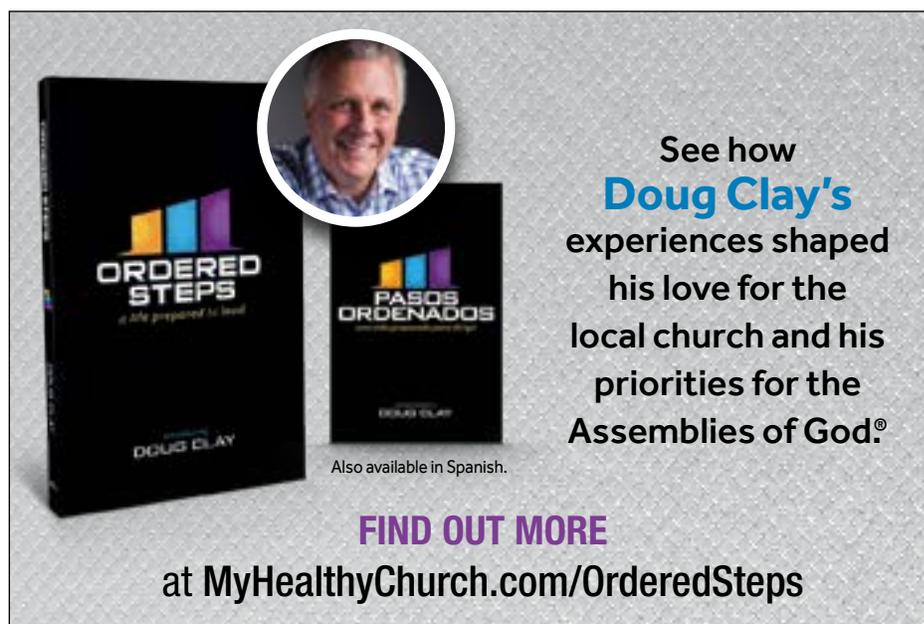
Challenges are a natural part of any endeavor, especially in ministry. But when they begin to stack up one right after another, it can quickly drain our enthusiasm. You may think that copying some other ministry style is a great way to jumpstart your own calling. But working outside of your God-given design will end in discouragement and ultimately defeat.

Keeping your enthusiasm up in the face of your responsibilities takes good and godly perspective. Failure can throw a damp towel on any fire you've been fanning. But true success in ministry means relying on the Holy Spirit to energize you. Winston Churchill once said, "Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." Uzziah discovered, "As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success" (2 Chronicles 26:5).

Where are you when it comes to enthusiasm? Is your gauge running on low? Do you need a quick fillup? The Holy Spirit is eager to renew your enthusiasm, and He's ready to do it daily. Let the Holy Spirit reinvigorate you to serve your people, meet the challenges of your place of ministry and embrace the responsibilities of your calling.



Doug Clay is general superintendent of the Assemblies of God (USA).



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A Healthy Church is God's Idea

BY ALTON GARRISON

Jesus is the Head and Builder of the Church, and He did not make a mistake in how He built it. We have a blueprint of what He did in the form of the vital, growing church of Acts 2, which was born through prayer and with the Spirit as power.

One of the strongest doctrinal cases for Spirit empowerment is in the call to carry out the transformative mission of God among both unchurched people and stagnant, uninspired believers. With the challenges facing the Church today, we cannot rely on our own ingenuity, intellect and human effort. God has not abandoned us to that fruitless recourse; but when we take hold of the Spirit as power, He fully equips and emboldens us to present hope to a lost world.

The Spirit's power is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that those who believe in Him would do the same works He did — and even greater.

The first-century Church believers received the Holy Spirit willingly, demonstrated power supernaturally, were led effectively, prayed fervently, fellowshiped regularly, taught sound doctrine consistently, preached the gospel passionately, shared resources liberally and grew exponentially. This last result was a consequence of all those factors that preceded it — perhaps most notably, the empowerment those in the Upper Room first received when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, the first event recorded in Acts 2.

We cannot expect to operate in our own strength to accomplish God's work on the earth. We must experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Transformation Is Possible

Transformation occurs both at a personal and a congregational level. Though our western mindset tends to focus on the individual, without whom there would be no group, it is not enough for just a few people to experience the transformational empowerment of the Holy Spirit to carry out the Great Commission by themselves. Congregational transformation and Spirit empowerment are necessary to ensure that our churches, regardless of size, are healthy and experiencing relationship with Christ.

Congregational transformation is more than the process of changing beliefs and behaviors; more than just changing goals, technologies, or systems; and more than examining our present condition and asking the right questions. Transformation is the necessary work of the Spirit that creates these processes and forms relationship at a corporate level — and it is this relationship that engenders lasting change.

Transformation is possible for any congregation, but it does not happen overnight. It is a process, not an event. It is a journey, not a destination.

Every person ... every church ... every leader has a next-level potential.

Definition of a Healthy Church

A healthy church does the following:

- Engages and maintains loving relationships (connect — fellowship)
- Develops and mobilizes the people (grow — discipleship)
- Acts with clear direction and outward focus (serve — gift-oriented ministry)
- Reproduces and multiplies Christ's mission in other peoples and places (go — evangelism/missions)
- Pursues and obeys God passionately (worship)

We need strong, healthy churches regardless of size — churches of influence that are making a difference in their communities. We need churches that are united, free of dissension, biblically designed and Spirit-anointed.

Personal Testimony

I became a pastor without even one day of pastoral ministry experience. Though First Assembly of God in North Little Rock, Arkansas, received scores of résumés, each from people with

more pastoral experience than I had, for some reason they chose me. I had never baptized anyone, dedicated a baby or done any of the dozens of ministry tasks even a young pastor has done many times. However, God kept me at First Assembly for 15 years and blessed the church. Why? I believe it was because of the transformation that occurred. We were on a journey of Spirit-empowered change, along with a biblical process that kept taking us to new levels.

I do not say this to pat myself on the back — quite the contrary. I share it to reveal that I felt completely unqualified for the task; but because the Holy Spirit had carte blanche in that congregation, transformation was possible — and that enabled us to carry out God's work

there despite my lack of experience.

You may be reading this and thinking that the task before you is intimidating, discouraging and humanly impossible. Satan may be insinuating that transformation is impossible, that the downward slide is inexorable, and that defeat for the Church on earth is already spelled out.

You may feel underqualified, insufficient and underpowered. You may feel locked into the “mom and pop” model where you are doing the entire ministry — and burning yourself out.

I would argue that if this is the case, you are in exactly the right place. Recognize you do not possess the power, ingenuity and

With the challenges facing the Church today, we cannot rely on our own ingenuity, intellect and human effort.

ability to succeed. Only the transformative power of the Holy Spirit will allow you to rekindle the passion for evangelism and mission, change the climate of the church, engage in a biblical process and disciple a priesthood of believers within the church.

Truly, we can do nothing apart from Him — but with God, all things are possible.

There is hope.



Alton Garrison is assistant general superintendent of the Assemblies of God (USA). Adapted from A Spirit-Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model by Alton Garrison. For more information, visit Acts2journey.com.

Jesus the Barrier Breaker

BY JAMES T. BRADFORD

Pastors who are shepherding and serving people well these days are doing so in a politically polarized, morally relativized, media-dominated world. Disagreeing with people is often interpreted as hostility; preaching on sexual purity is increasingly being heard as hate speech; and accusations of discrimination seem to never end, no matter what we say or do. Meanwhile, social media is redefining how we talk to one another. It is very easy for spiritual leaders to feel helplessly outshouted and outmuscled by the culture in general.

But here comes Jesus. Against a cultural backdrop of violence, political corruption, social injustice and pervasive demon worship, Jesus defiantly proclaimed, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Paul would later say, “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (Colossians 1:6). Person by person, day by day, Jesus is still pushing against the headwinds of prevailing culture — and winning.

I have come to appreciate Jesus as the ultimate Barrier Breaker. It starts with how Jesus values people over social norms or institutional stereotyping. He doesn’t label people, but he very personally loves and redeems them. He looks at every person through the lens

Messy and tiring as it may be, entering people’s worlds in Jesus’ name gives them access to life-giving truth and living water.

of created dignity. It is as if God has hung a sign around the neck of every human being: “Made in the image of God — handle with care!” This creation-centered dignity trumps preference, prejudice, politics, passion, position and power.

For example, “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” (John 4:7). Here, Jesus broke at least four seemingly insurmountable barriers.

First, Jesus broke through the racial barrier. This is the barrier that the Samaritan woman initially reacted to: “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9). Racial prejudice ran deep between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus’ Jewish listeners had nowhere to put the parable of the Good Samaritan, because the star of the story was, yes, a Samaritan.

Jesus also broke through the gender barrier. This is what first shocked the disciples when they got back from their shopping trip. They were “surprised to find him talking with a woman.” (John 4:27). Jewish rabbis would pray, “I am thankful that I am neither a Gentile nor a woman.” They considered Samaritan women, in particular, to be unclean from birth.

Then Jesus broke through the religious barrier. Because the Samaritan religion was a contorted mix of Judaism and paganism, the Jews considered Samaritans little more than religious road kill. Differences in dearly held ceremonial traditions and doctrines, laced with religious hostility and unforgotten history, created barriers that most in Jesus’ time could not overcome.

Finally, Jesus broke through the moral barrier. “The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18). She was a woman with a past, shamed by lust and relational failure. Yet here was Jesus, not even letting her lifestyle create a barrier to His living water.

The question is, “How did He do this”? Thankfully, the answer is not complicated. He simply entered her world, and He touched her heart. Entering her world was the unnatural thing to do. The racial, gender, religious and moral barriers were immense. It would have been easier to label and accuse than to listen and engage. Entering her world took time and courage, but Jesus did it.

Having entered her world, Jesus then touched her heart. Beneath this lady’s promiscuous exterior was a heart that had been used and discarded by many different men. Now this man, Jesus, would change the rules of engagement and reach her soul. No barrier was too strong for that important work. He exposed her secrets prophetically but handled her heart tenderly. Jesus loved someone incredibly different from himself, and in doing so left her reformed, not demeaned.

Followers of Jesus cannot take this lightly. As Creator God, Jesus imbedded immense value in every human being, and as Incarnate God, He pushed beyond reaction to redemption. Jesus came to bring life, not apply labels or play to culture. This is Jesus the Barrier Breaker.

This is also where the Holy Spirit does some of His best work through His shepherds. Messy and tiring as it may be, entering people’s worlds in Jesus’ name gives them access to life-giving truth and living water. And touching people’s hearts opens to

them a whole new world of liberating, Jesus-centered grace and love. Those who pastor and lead well find themselves doing no less. Breaking barriers and loving people still overpowers cultural headwinds and media hostility. All the while, Jesus works and loves through us, and builds His Church.



James T. Bradford is general secretary of the Assemblies of God (USA).

A Clean Start

BY RICK DUBOSE

The old Law had an annual celebration at which a special offering would be presented and a scapegoat released. This ritual marked a line on the calendar saying goodbye to the past year and all its sins and missteps, and hello to a clean start. This allowed the nation and its people to move forward, unencumbered with past sins. My question is: Does the calendar still give us the same opportunity? Are seasons and years still a good friend that allows us to release the past and move ahead unencumbered? I know we no longer participate in the rituals of the Law and that Jesus is our Jubilee, but the principle of an annual restart may still apply.

In Hebrews 8:13, when speaking about the transition between the old covenant and the new, the writer says, “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”

When a thing becomes obsolete, it should disappear. If it is kept, it decreases the opportunity and potential of the new. It becomes useless clutter, taking up space and energy that should belong to the new. In the same way, when we emotionally hold on to our obsolete past, we hinder our new future and all its potential. It would be like towing an old wrecked vehicle behind a new one. The new one could never perform at its peak, and the old one would have no benefit from being dragged around. The dragging does not make the old new, better or useful. That’s why what is old and obsolete should disappear!

The question then is this: How do we make the past year and all its sins, mistakes, losses and regrets disappear?

In Philippians 3:13, Paul writes, “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.” He says we should forget what is behind. How do we do that? I can easily forget where I put my keys, but forgetting my sins and the sins others have committed against me is on a whole different level. How can I do that? I think there are two actions — rituals, as it were — that help us forget our past sins and make them “disappear” so we can go forward unhindered. One of those rituals is to finish what we have left incomplete.

Unfinished tasks are hard to forget. They pop up in prayer, conversation, board meetings and relationships. They move from year to year, house to house and church to church. They can be an unpaid bill or an unfinished commitment, an unforgiven friend or a half-clean garage. The question then becomes: What things in your life won’t disappear from your thoughts and emotions because you haven’t finished them? Write them down, put on your work clothes, get a broom and clean the garage, pick up the phone and make the call, or write the check and pay the bill. It’s often like the walls of Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah; they had been broken for decades, but once they became the focus and priority of the people, they were completed in 52 days! Stop towing the wrecks of the past everywhere you go! Finish them, and move on.

The next question is: What can I do about the things I finished but didn’t finish well? What about my sin that hurt others and my decisions that hurt the church or my family that I can’t fix with more work? The answer is, what can’t be finished must be forgiven!

Ask God to forgive you and receive His forgiveness according to the power of the cleansing blood of Jesus, not according to your

Stop towing the wrecks of the past everywhere you go! Finish them, and move on.

merits. Next, forgive yourself. Sure, it was stupid and selfish and completely your fault, but if your Father has forgiven you, who are you to keep yourself in the bondage of unforgiveness? Finally, ask others to forgive you. Once a thing is truly forgiven, it can be forgotten. Once a thing can be forgotten, it can ride the scapegoat off into oblivion and disappear forever.

The old Law did not live up to its full potential because generation after generation did not keep it as they should have. So, should they have continued to use the old covenant and its Law just so they could prove that it could have worked and that it was valuable? No, because the moment had passed, and it is now obsolete. The principle here is that once God has moved on, so must we. Therefore, seeing that God did not lengthen 2017 but allowed it to end as planned, we need to declare it obsolete, finished, forgiven and forgotten.

Under the Law, once the sacrifice became ashes and the scapegoat had cleared the horizon, the people could return home free from the past and ready to start the next year unencumbered — and so can we!

Happy New Year!



Rick DuBose is general treasurer of the Assemblies of God (USA).



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