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Eddie Sharp

Karen Hood

Larry James

Billie Silvey

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Ministry and the Gospel of John

Incarnation and Ministry
Women and Ministry
Three Forms of Witness
Pastoral Ministry

The following essays were presented at the Symposium on Ministry hosted by *Leaven* at the 52nd annual Pepperdine Bible Lectures, April 25-28, 1995.

Incarnation and Ministry in John's Gospel by Eddie Sharp

The biblical doctrine of the incarnation informs the ministry of the church. The gospel of John powerfully presents Jesus as the Son of God in the flesh. Those whose faith grows out of John's gospel will have their lives and ministries shaped by the one who came in the flesh.

John writes his gospel so that those who read might come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God without seeing him. To this end, John begins his gospel with an introduction to a powerful Word. This Word is in the beginning. This Word is with God. This Word is God. This Word is instrumental in the creation of the world. This Word becomes flesh and lives among the men and women of the world. This Word is the flesh that is the medium for God's lesson in grace and truth. By this Word in the flesh the Father reveals himself to all. In I John, John writes that the one who denies that the Word came in the flesh partakes of the spirit of the anti-Christ. Jesus coming in the flesh is a serious matter. His incarnation is a cornerstone in the doctrine of his nature.

Even more than an essential element in some static doctrine of the nature of the Christ, the incar-

nation continues to feed life and meaning into the church. In the incarnation, the transcendent God becomes immanent. In the incarnation of Jesus, Christ gives the church direction for ministry that takes it toward the world and into the lives of people. In the incarnation, the church learns that anthropology and theology are both legitimate concerns. The church at the end of the twentieth century needs to be informed by the lessons of the incarnation.

Lesson One: The transcendent God has become immanent in this world.

The true nature of God is beyond our comprehension. Human language cannot describe the one of which none greater can be conceived. Glimpses into his holiness on Sinai or in the call of Isaiah strike awesome fear in the hearts of the faithful. One knows that God is not a man or anything like a man. God dwells in unapproachable light.

This transcendent God created the universe of worlds and stars. He set each one in place with purpose. Into our world, God brought light and life and love. The transcendent One now had an address where he walked in the cool of the evening. The transcendent one asked questions, pronounced judgment, set boundaries, made covenants, freed captives, gave law, conquered nations, called prophets, punished sin, preserved remnants. The transcendent one made a world and was soon up to his elbows in it. The transcendent one and the immanent one are one.

Lesson Two: Jesus Christ is God with us.

The Word became flesh and lived among us. Jesus came into the world born in a stable, not a palace. He was the son of a carpenter, not a prince. He came into an unvarnished world to meet real people in real life. In John he met eager kingdom seekers and smart-mouthed men who despised his Nazarene roots. He attended a wedding feast. He was gentle with the starlight questions of Nicodemus and insisted that new life and new birth went together. He stopped in Samaria and drank water drawn by a woman who had lost at love so many times that she no longer played by the rules. He strolled through the clinic of lost hopes at the pool of Bethesda and brought real healing to that world of comfortable pain. He fed the hungry bread and watched them retreat from him when they heard word of a more essential meal. He reached out to a woman caught in adultery and a man born blind, leading them both into a new light. He stood and cried with the family in their time of loss and then awakened the moldering Lazarus to the love of his sisters. He was welcomed to Jerusalem as a king but took the role of a servant. With bowl and towel, he taught the disciples love and humility. He went on to instruct them about the home in heaven, the fruit to be borne, the comforter to come, the victory to be won. When he prayed, he prayed to the One with whom he was one.

The ministry of Jesus was seeking the lost. Even through his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion, he did not insulate himself from life. After his resurrection, Jesus invited Thomas to place his hands into the scars on his hands and side. No other incident could be more indicative of Christ's desire to know this world and to let the world know him. Jesus was and is God with us. The transcendent Son and immanent Son are one.

Lesson Three: The church is the body of Christ in the world.

When Jesus returned to the Father, the church was called together in the preaching of the gospel, the power of the Spirit, and the baptism of the faithful. God added to the church those who were being saved. The purpose of the church was to be the presence of Christ in the world. The image of the church as the body of Christ is much more than poetry. The church is the continuing presence of Christ in the world. As the continuing presence of Christ in the world, the church partakes of the same dual nature as Christ. The church is not of this world but is in this world for the sake of the world's salvation.

The church is the body composed of the faithful who have earthly addresses but have been lifted up to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. By God's grace, Christians are invited to set their minds on the things that are above where their lives are hidden with Christ in God. When Jesus prays in John, he says of his disciples that they are not of the world any more than he is of the world. The transcendence of the church is a result of Jesus coming into the world and lifting his people into God's presence.

While the church has been touched by the eternal, the church is in the world to be an evidence of God to the world still in darkness. The church is called to live in this world and care about the same people Jesus cared about when he was in his flesh: the sick, the bereaved, the hungry, the oppressed, the doubters, the innocent and the guilty. In his prayer, Jesus prays for the safe but productive ministry of his disciples:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. (John 17:15-20)

The church is sanctified and in the world. The transcendent church and immanent church are one.

Lesson Four: The congregations and Christians should allow the incarnation to influence their plans and programs.

The ability of the church and the individual Christian to move Godward and personward is not an innate capacity. It results from an intentional decision to realize the complementary relationship between the Godward and personward thrusts. The decision is difficult. Our churches are struggling with balancing these two components of church life. In some churches the Godward folks and the peopleward folks have decided that their respective forms of Christian faith are incompatible. How tragic to believe that a choice must be made between two elements that are always found together in the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the early church. To choose between being seated with the Father in the heavenly places and being deeply involved in the

relentless search for the lost is to miss one of the delicious dialectic tensions of faith. The doctrine of the incarnation reminds us of how the tension is resolved.

In our personal lives and in our churches, we may have preferences about worship styles, song

If we understand incarnation, we understand the beauty of loving accommodation for lost humanity.

-Eddie Sharp

selections, versions of the Bible, and other matters. We may have developed a specialized church language that allows us to distinguish the insiders from the outsiders in a heartbeat. We may have developed church rhetoric that anathematizes our culture because of its worldliness, materialism and immorality. This fortress church behavior confesses a weakness and fearfulness of the church in the world. A fortress can be very comforting in times of great trouble. However, Jesus did not pray that the Father would protect the disciples as they retreated from the world but as they went out into it.

We must remember the example of Jesus. We can be sure that Jesus was comfortable in his heavenly home. The music of the seraphim was pleasing to him. The praise of myriads of angels was his proper praise. The unboundedness of Godness was his. Still he turned from that to take a form that was restrictive, to hear praise that was crude, to live life that was mortal, to die a death that he did not deserve. Jesus left his fortress with all of its trappings to bring life to dying men and women.

When we see our church stresses against the backdrop of the Jesus who humbled himself to create salvation, we appear not to have learned the lesson of the incarnation. If we learn the lesson, we will want to know how human beings think and what hungers gnaw in their hearts. We will accuse less and understand more. We will be willing to create more selfless outreach. We will not do and say what we prefer but what we know will be most understood and penetrating to the lost ones present. Trading a songbook for

an overhead projector might be in the spirit of the incarnation. Using a modern version of the Bible instead of an old version might be in the spirit of the incarnation. Using more visual and kinesthetic elements in teaching and worship might be in the same spirit. An act of incarnation has occurred anytime a congregation or a Christian chooses to leave a scriptural personal preference for another scriptural choice that has a greater potential for reaching the lost. Some may criticize that this smacks of accommodating to culture. Incarnation is an accommodation. It is an accommodation to humanity, to sinfulness, to culture. If we understand the incarnation, we understand the beauty of loving accommodation for lost humanity. In incarnational personal and church life, we follow the example of Jesus. Those that are in the Lord and those that are in the world are one.

The lessons of the incarnation are powerful. We need to receive them as necessary instruction for churches living through times of great change and crisis. May we keep our eyes always upon the One who left heaven that we might have life. This Jesus calls us out of our comfortable religion into his ministry to the lost.

Eddie Sharp is preaching minister of the University Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas.

Women And Ministry in John (Private) by Karen Hood

I have been involved in ministry all my life. My father preached or taught in Christian schools during my growing-up years. In high school, I taught my first children's class. Since then I have worked in a wide variety of ministry areas. In some of these areas I served as a leader and in others as part of the team.

Thinking back through the years, I've come to recognize several different motivations behind my serving in ministry. At times Christian duty and responsibility motivated me. Sometimes guilt spurred me on. I often felt, "this area of ministry will not get done if I do not do it." At other times the expectations of others encouraged me, but there were also times when a strong desire to be involved in certain ministries motivated me.

I have also reflected on the effects these motivations had on me. They have run the gamut from excitement and fulfillment to frustration and

burnout. Plus, the experience I've had working alongside my husband (who is a minister) with "ministry systems" and "involvement programs" for the past fourteen years has convinced me that I am not alone in these observations. Fewer people seem to be serving in our churches than before. I have asked myself questions such as, "Why do I serve?" or "How do I know I'm serving in the areas that fit the gifts the Lord has given to me through the Holy Spirit?" I've wondered, "How do I find fulfillment, fruit and the inner joy that the Lord promises when we are obedient to Him?" (John 15:10-11) Now, in this stage of my spiritual pilgrimage I'm discovering the Lord graciously provides answers. After all, he knows all the areas of my spiritual life, where I need to grow and develop, but he loves me where I am right now!

One of the ways the Lord has provided me with these precious answers is through special people who help to encourage me in my walk with Jesus. I have mentors to give me an example to follow. These dear friends also give me insight and inspiration in many different areas of my life.

Recently I have even found some of my mentors in an unexpected place: the Scriptures. There are a group of women whose stories are found in the Gospel of John who have had a powerful impact on me spiritually. This particular group of women has taught me where the real motivation for ministry comes from.

Nine women who are special to me are mentioned in John's account of the life of Jesus. Their stories are as varied as their backgrounds, but they all had one thing in common—an encounter with Jesus Christ. As their needs were brought to his attention, Jesus addressed them powerfully. They had questions and found he had answers and because they looked to him, their lives were changed forever.

Look briefly at their stories; you will see that at the request of his mother, Jesus changed water to wine. The woman of Samaria received "living water" for her thirsty soul. The adulterous woman received compassion and forgiveness. Mary and Martha were eyewitnesses of God's power and glory as they received their beloved brother back from the dead. The four women John mentions at the cross received healing and deliverance and the distinct privilege of traveling with Jesus during his ministry. Finally, Mary Magdalene was given the first glimpse of Christ's glorious resurrected body.

All these women gave their trust and undying devotion to Jesus. They were hospitable, gave generously of their time and financial resources, and shared the Lord's good news with others. They couldn't do enough for him. Their service, however,

was not their focus. Their focus was Jesus. That's what ministry is—fruit born out of a love relationship with the Savior that is continually nourished by being with him.

One of the clearest examples of this love relationship with Jesus is found in the life of Mary of Bethany. Jesus was a guest in her home, and, together with Martha and Lazarus, she ministered to Jesus and his disciples. Three stories are recorded in the Gospels about her. In all three Mary is found at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42; John 11; John 12:1-7; Matt 26:10-13). When she was spiritually hungry, she was at his feet. In her grief and disappointment over the death of her brother, she was at his feet. When her heart was overflowing with gratitude she was at his feet. At Jesus' feet she found her identity and her place in his Kingdom. Jesus said of her "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Matt 26:10). Her ministry had eternal impact. This is my heart's desire also. I long to be serving in such a way that Jesus is glorified.

Four lessons from Mary's experience at Jesus' feet have helped me with my motivation to minister.

First, Mary sat at Jesus' feet in worship. She loved him with great passion, and she expressed that love in giving to the Lord the very best she had to give. The anointing of Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, the tears and the tenderness she showed the Lord were simply a response of worship and adoration flowing out of a grateful heart. Ministry that brings joy and fulfillment has its foundation in worship.

Second, Mary sat at Jesus' feet in humility. She was not concerned with anybody else's expectations of her. She had her attention fixed solely on Jesus. She was even willing to endure public humiliation to express her devotion to him.

Third, Mary sat at his feet as a learner. Mary took the time to listen to Jesus. Through this time with him she discovered the burden on his heart. He was on the way to the cross and while everyone else was enjoying a dinner party, she was anointing his feet for burial. In **Surprised By The Power of the Spirit**, Jack Deere writes, "He chose the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Why? Because this was the place his Heavenly Father had chosen before the foundation of the earth to anoint his Son for burial." At the feet of Jesus, Mary came to understand his mission. This lesson shows we need to quit doing so much talking and spend more time listening to the voice of the Lord. In those quiet times with him our direction for ministry in his Kingdom becomes clear.

Finally, Mary sat at Jesus' feet content. We live in a world designed to feed our discontent. We

are distracted by so many opportunities. A lot of them are good, but we can become so busy and fragmented that we accomplish very little and find we do not feel close to the Lord anymore. Jesus was

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-Karen Hood

all Mary needed. Nothing else mattered to her. He was her number one priority. When we learn to fix our eyes on Jesus, our days become ordered and we find contentment. I love the lyrics of Helen Lemmel's song,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.
Look full in his wonderful face.
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.
In the light of His Glory and Grace.

Now the questions I once had difficulty answering are becoming much clearer. "Why do I serve?" I serve because I have a relationship with a real person—Jesus Christ. I cannot help but respond to the love he has shown me by making my life available to whatever ministry he chooses to do through me. "How do I know I'm serving in the areas that fit the gifts the Lord has given to me through the Holy Spirit?" I am learning to listen and discern his voice through quiet times at His feet. He will never lead me astray. He knows me better than I know myself. "How do I find fulfillment, fruit and the inner joy the Lord promises when I am obedient to him?" When I respond in obedience to his leading I know I will please him and he will accomplish his work through me. He won't fail, and I get to be a part of his mighty work. What a privilege! That's the best kind of fulfillment and fruit in ministry for everyone. Remember, stay at his feet.

Karen Hood ministers among the saints at the South MacArthur Church of Christ, Irving, Texas.

"Feed My Sheep" (Pastoral Ministry in the Gospel of John)

by Larry James

The metaphors of "pastoral ministry" emerge from a fading, rural agrarian culture. The familiar, significant and thoroughly biblical image of a shepherd guiding his sheep across a Palestinian hillside shares little if anything in common with the surface realities and fast-paced change of our urban, post-modern, high-tech environment. Allow yourself to plunge even deeper into the urban reality of America on the threshold of the twenty-first century and here confront the fierce, stark images of gang life, addiction, poverty, erosion of community, widening class divisions, violence and greed.

Obviously, cultural, social and historic contexts determine the composition of word pictures used in human communication. Jesus' lakeside conversation with Peter following the resurrection focused on the simple, but rigorous demands of leadership among and for the benefit of the new people of God. Peter needed an opportunity to recant his shameful, three-fold denunciation of his Lord. Jesus obliged him with a firm, insistent and loving confrontation. Jesus spoke of love, both brotherly and godly; and sheep, both young and old, the hungry, the wayward and those in need of tending (21:15-17).

Not many sheep pasture in the shadows of inner city Dallas, Los Angeles or New York. Shepherds appear to be a vanishing breed these days. In the ghetto-like neighborhood where I work, a conversation about sheep and shepherds might get the participants lost in the lessons of an unfamiliar cultural history and anthropology. Try then to imagine Jesus and Peter seated around an open drum that blazes with a newly made fire in the chilly dawn of a Dallas back street.

Over a cup of warm coffee and after a slim breakfast of what they saved from yesterday's supper,

Jesus said to Peter, "***Pete, are you with me, brother? Or are you headed somewhere else?***"

Peter looked at Jesus and replied, "***Yeah, Lord; man, you know I'm with you.***"

Jesus said to him, "***Help my folks here in the 'hood'.***"

A second time he said to him, "***Pete, are you really with me now?***"

Peter answered him, "***Sure I am, Lord; you know I'm with you.***"

Jesus said to him, ***“Take care of my people.”*** A third time Jesus asked him, ***“Pete, are you really with me, are you my ‘bro’?”***

Peter felt put down and shamed by this third question and he shouted back, ***“Man, you’re in charge here! You really got it going on. You know I’m with you!”***

Jesus answered one last time, ***“Okay then my brother, help the people who live in this community and I’ll know for sure that you’re with me.”***

While John presents images drawn from pastoral life to describe the ministry Jesus shares with those who follow him as Lord and leader (10:1-30), the realities of feeding and tending Jesus’ flock or of helping and caring for the folks in the neighborhood where his followers live and work transcend the limits of any cultural or historic context. What then do shepherds share in common with effective Christian leaders today, whether they work in community-based urban ministries or in the more guarded and managed atmosphere of suburban tracts? In short, how do men and women serve the people Jesus loves and claims as his own? What work do they perform?

In an attempt to bridge the cultural and historic gap between the first century world of shepherds and our modern world of often frantic pastors, the image of “servant leader” proves helpful. Shepherds served the interests of others, both sheep and owners. Shepherds functioned as guides and leaders who exercised the authority of staff and crook as they moved their flocks about from pasture to pasture. Shepherds, entrusted with the property of others, served their masters’ or employers’ interests by providing leadership for the sheep who depended upon them. Effective shepherds, like effective pastors, function as servant leaders.

Servant Leaders and “Identification”

John tells the story of God’s incarnation into the midst of his creation (1:14). The amazing power of John’s good news grips our hearts in his poetic “Prologue.” Who can comprehend the notion of the “Word” appearing in a human body? To claim that God arrives to dwell among the likes of us—smelly fishermen, shameless tax collectors, urban sophisticates, ghetto thugs, or suburban professionals—is to claim everything for the significance of the message. Equally amazing, and possibly even more penetrating, is the testimony of John the Baptist, ***“Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*** (1:29, 36). The shepherd takes to himself the nature, the flesh, the needs of the sheep he comes to tend. The one responsible for creation breaks into the

world he created to radically identify with those he comes to save, to lead and to serve. The most effective shepherds know their sheep; not just by sight or mark, but by life experience, mindset and nature. The truly effective shepherd gets inside the world of his sheep and feels right at home.

Jesus’ description of himself as the “good shepherd” reflects the intimate knowledge he possesses concerning his “sheep” resulting from his experience of incarnation. As the “good shepherd,” Jesus knows his sheep and they know him. They follow eagerly because they recognize his voice. The sheep follow the shepherd because their shepherd knows them (10:27). Unlike a hireling who runs at the first sign of danger, the “good shepherd” who cares for the sheep, willingly lays down his life for them because of his personal knowledge of his flock (10:11-15).

Those who serve the people of Jesus as effective servant leaders always begin with *identification*. Just as Jesus “came down” to embrace our flesh in order to identify with us as the “good shepherd,” so those who work as servant leaders must resist the temptation to deny the common humanity shared with those for whom God calls them to lead and care. Godly leaders do not “rise above” those whom they lead. Rather, they remain among the flock of their calling. They understand their friends. They perform every act of leadership, even corrective discipline and confrontation, with the compassion and the genuine concern born of their awareness of the human nature shared with those they lead. The men and women God uses to tend his flock most effectively identify with the people they lead.

With leaders who serve, identification leads to understanding. John presents Jesus as the shepherd whose complete identification with his sheep produced an uncanny understanding of both their needs and their nature. Jesus knew the limits of the human heart and the dangers of trusting in the people who surrounded him (2:24-25). He could detect the hidden pain in the lives of people, even in the chance encounters of his life (4:17-18). He understood the motives of needy people and he never resorted to patronizing those who sought to exploit his position or his power. Instead, he challenged the most impoverished to realize the eternal nature of the special food he had to offer (6:15, 26-27). Jesus understood the pain of grief, as well as the power of friendship and human love (11:33-35). He prayed for the unity of his people because he knew just how difficult a challenge God’s dream for the “oneness” of all believers would be (17:20-24). He challenges a key leader like Peter because he understands the benefit of confrontation, accountability and renewal through

confession (21:15-17).

Servant Leaders Act with Appropriate Authority

The shepherd image in the Old Testament involved authority (1 Chron 17:6; 2 Sam 5:2; Gen 49:24; Hos 4:16; Jer 31:10, et. al.). Yahweh seeks to shepherd his people, Israel in view of the failure of the false, unfaithful shepherds who fail in their responsibilities (Ezek 34:1-16). Further, as the ultimate shepherd, Yahweh will judge and separate his flock (Ezek 34:17ff).

Jesus acts decisively with this same authority when he clears the Temple of those who exploit God's people (2:13-22). By this action Jesus asserts his authority on behalf of God's people whose leaders prove undeserving of trust or respect. When Jesus encounters Peter after breakfast on the seashore, his questioning confrontation conveys the authority Peter will need to pastor Jesus' flock. However, the authority of the godly shepherd always centers in love and proceeds from the shepherd's experience of the Father's will. The unfaithful shepherds of Ezekiel's day fail because they refuse to hear the word of the Lord and turn instead to feeding themselves at the expense of the sheep.

In contrast, Jesus feeds himself on the word and will of the Father who sent him (4:31ff). Jesus receives his authority from the one who sent him on his mission. As a result, he does nothing on his own authority, but only on the basis of the authority of his father who commissioned him to come (5:19-20, 30, 36-38; 6:37-40). He speaks and teaches only the message and words received from the one who sends him (7:14-18, 28-29; 8:12-47). Jesus exercises authority over the realm of death, but only by the authority of his Father (11:41-42). The connection between Jesus, the servant leader, and God, the sending Father, plays itself out throughout John's account of Jesus' life and work (see 12:27-32, 44-50; 18:37-38).

Jesus clearly displays the nature of his authority when just prior to his own death he stoops to wash the dirty feet of his followers. In this act of humility and self-denial Jesus teaches his followers an important prerequisite for authoritative leadership. Those who lead, first must serve (13:1-20).

Furthermore, Jesus' authority grounds itself in his willingness to lay down his life for his sheep (10:11-18). Jesus' intimate knowledge of the Father prompts him to sacrifice his own life for the good of the Father's flock. The sheep respond to this good shepherd because they know his voice. Jesus speaks with the authority of the Father because he and the Father exist as one, united in person and purpose and

prepared to die in order that the sheep might receive life (10:25-30).

Servant leaders exercise a version of this same authority. Drawn from an intimate knowledge of God's word discovered in both study and personal experience (16:12-15), the modern day shepherd of God's flock exerts the authority of love in leading God's people through a world of danger and confusion. Jesus relies upon servant leaders in his church to lead his sheep today in the same manner in which he led them during his ministry (10:3-6). A servant leader exhibits a heart and a lifestyle like Jesus in that he or she willingly sacrifices his or her life for the good of those being led.

Servant Leaders Empower People for Life

When Jesus approaches the crippled man by the Bethzatha pool, located interestingly near the Temple's Sheep gate, he asks the curious question, "*Do you want to be made well?*" (5:6). In the simple question Jesus accords a measure of dignity to a man who knew well the horrors of suffering without dignity. Jesus offers the man a choice. The decision is his to make. In the man's explanation of his plight, Jesus hears a positive response that frees him to take healing action.

As the good shepherd, Jesus comes to impart life to his flock in the here and now. At times this goal involves him in acts of mercy and healing (John 5 and 9). In other settings he devotes himself to meeting the physical needs of the people he seeks to reach (6:1-14). Even more significantly, he willingly offers himself as the food leading to eternal life (6:25-59). With others he guides, encourages and instructs (3:1-15; 4:16ff; 6:25-71; 9:3-4; 14:1-16:33). In each case, Jesus accesses the needs of individuals and groups before providing what leads in every case to life.

Those who lead among Jesus' people today will pursue the same goals. Servant leaders devote themselves to empowering people for effective living. Whether according dignity to people who seldom if ever receive respect, meeting the pressing needs of the physically or emotionally disadvantaged, guiding the confused, or teaching and encouraging those who seek truth, shepherds see to it that their sheep thrive. Servant leaders busy themselves with the important work of positioning people for what Jesus calls the "abundant life" (10:10). Like their leader, contemporary servant leaders will give up their own lives for the sake of those whom they seek to prepare and empower.

Servant Leaders Seek to Enlarge Their Flocks

Jesus reveals the broad scope of his mission when he refers to his plans for increasing the size of his flock:

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd”
(John 10:16).

Reflecting the Father’s universal love and compassion, Jesus signals his own desire to reach out beyond the “fold” of Israel with his message of grace and truth to all humankind.

His encounter with the Samaritan woman exemplifies his commitment to extending his Father’s love and pastoral care to all people regardless of race, nationality, or gender (4:7ff). The surprise of both the woman and Jesus’ friends reveals the radical and sometimes shocking nature of God’s agenda for his creation (4:9, 27). Jesus’ willingness not only to visit with the woman at the well, but also to stay in the homes of Samaritans for two days, went beyond the limits of any contemporary understanding of God’s mercy.

The Greeks who approach Philip seeking an audience with Jesus, prompt him to reflect on the meaning of his impending death. Jesus envisions a death that will result in all people being drawn into the sphere of God’s life (12:32). Jesus knows that what he begins in a first century death will result in a worldwide extension of God’s grace throughout the remainder of human history (17:20-21).

Servant leaders continually look for ways to extend their service and leadership into new areas and among new people. Entrusted with the grace and the truth of God, servant leaders never grow satisfied with the status quo of past accomplishments, but press on to extend God’s light and love as far as possible. In the process they equip and prepare those they lead to share in this work of gathering people for God. Jesus’ ministry begins with invitations to others to join him in his mission (1:35-51). As these first disciples follow him, he prepares them for their own work of leadership that will result in the expansion of the flock he comes to feed, tend and save for his Father.

Living As A Leader in the “Hood”

John wrote for the benefit of those outside the sheepfold of Jesus (20:30-31). In the process John provides a clear vision for pastoral ministry as he

Effective leaders empower people for the discovery of abundant life provided by God himself.

-Larry James

carefully develops his version of the life of his master and shepherd. What does John’s model offer those whom God calls to provide leadership in ministry settings far removed from the pastoral world of the first century? What can present-day urban leaders gain from John’s understanding of ministry?

First, servant leaders enter the world, the life context of those they seek to lead and serve. Further, they do not come and go, they move in and they remain among the people as incarnate expressions of God’s love, hope and grace. Relocation always precedes reconciliation. In the midst of the people, in the settings where ministry occurs, servants leaders consider no task beneath them. Effective leaders in pastoral ministry never forget the image of Jesus washing the feet of those men he sought to lead.

Second, servant leaders prepare people for life without them. Healthy pastoral leadership never ends in dependency. Effective leaders point beyond themselves to the one who sends them. In the process they demonstrate the fact that he is the only one who can adequately sustain the entire community. As Jesus pointed beyond the immediacy of loaves and fish to deeper hungers, so effective leaders today direct people beyond short-term answers to more sustaining, long-term solutions to human dilemmas; solutions grounded in the reality of a God who enters life for his people. Effective leaders empower people for the discovery of abundant life provided by God himself. Faithful leaders never confuse or mislead people about the source of real life. Like Jesus, the servant leader understands that his or her life is expendable by definition. Like the “good shepherd,” servant leaders regard their lives as expendable for the sake of those they lead and serve.

Third, servant leaders spend their lives gathering people. Fragmentation, alienation and erosion characterize the declining condition of community

life at the close of the twentieth century. Jesus' desire to draw all people to himself has never been more relevant or appropriate than today. Leaders who pattern their ministries after the life of Jesus will sacrifice themselves in the demanding work of calling people together in his name. As hopeless and life-weary residents of urban neighborhoods begin to hear the voice of the "good shepherd" broadcast through the efforts of those servant leaders who represent him, genuine community will be restored and God's flock, his new community will thrive.

Larry James is Director of Central Dallas Ministries, a service of God to persons in the inner city of Dallas and a ministry of the Preston Road Church of Christ, Dallas, Texas.

Three Forms of Witness from John's Gospel

By **Billie Silvey**

Christianity is a divinely-instituted religion. We would know little of God and his plans for us if he hadn't revealed them to us. That's what John tells us in the opening of his gospel. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Jesus is God's word of revelation to his people, telling us about him and his will for our lives. As W. T. Hamilton said in his book, **Show Us the Father**, Jesus is "the medium of communication between God and man."

Christianity is also a personal religion. Revelation means little to us until it takes root and produces effects in our lives. "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us" (John 1:14). Jesus is God's word incarnate, showing us the Father in the practical and personal dealings of daily life.

And though Christianity is personal, it isn't just for us alone. We need to share it. Jesus isn't God's only word. "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John" (John 1:6). John also had a God-given mission—to tell people about Jesus and call them to follow him. John came "as a witness" (John 1:7). Frank Pack, in his **Living Word** commentary on John, points out that the noun *witness* appears fourteen times in the book of John, and the verb *to bear witness* appears thirty-three times. A witness can be either an eyewitness or a person who gives testimony or makes a confession for the purpose of creating faith. The book of John is a book of testimony as first one person, and then another, is confronted with Jesus, responds to him, then shares what they know with others.

We, today, are challenged to pass on our

knowledge of Christ in the same three ways. We share his revelation as we teach his Word. We share his incarnation as we live out his influence in our lives. And we share John's call as we call each other, encouraging one another to come to him.

Each of these three forms of witness is illustrated in the book of John by an individual with whom we can identify. And each can be seen among our friends and acquaintances today.

Witness by Revelation

John the Baptist is a good example of witness by revelation. God gave John a message for the people of his time. He was to prepare them for the coming Messiah and identify him when he came. He encouraged faith (1:7), urged people to become God's children (1:12), and pointed them toward the salvation available in Christ (1:29).

One of the first traits we notice about John is his humility. He knew his place, and he was careful not to get in the way of Christ.

Florence Collins, in her **Lessons from the Gospel of John**, points out that John the Baptist testified to the preeminence of Jesus in the following five areas:

1. in the honor due Jesus. "He who comes after me has surpassed me," John said (John 1:15). "The thongs of his sandals I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:27). "He must become greater; I must become less important" (John 1:30).
2. in the preexistence of Jesus. "He was before me" (John 1:15, 30).
3. in the spiritual fullness and power of Jesus. "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him" (John 1:32).
4. in the sacrificial work of Jesus. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36).
5. in the unique personality of Jesus. "This is the Son of God" (John 1:34).

Thinking of John the Baptist brings to mind a man I know who has many of the same qualities. Michio Nagai has taught many people about Jesus—both as a college teacher and in local ministry. A dedicated student, he studies the scriptures in the original languages, then presents them in the context of life today. He, too, is a man marked by humility, a real servant, who works well with people of all ages, races and circumstances. Many have come to Christ and many more have grown closer to him as a result of his witness by revelation.

Witness by Incarnation

The man born blind is an example from the book of John of witness by incarnation. He became a living testimony to those who saw him. As Jesus said of his blindness, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3).

As soon as Jesus healed him, he began to witness to others—not of some special message he'd received from God, but of his own experience. And the more he spoke, the more he understood and the stronger his witness became.

The first thing we notice about this man is his honesty. He based his claims on his own experience and never claimed to know more than he did. We're also impressed by his courage. As Gerard Sloyan points out in his **Interpretation** commentary on John, "John 9 tells of a courageous little Jew who keeps telling the truth and will not be silenced by intimidation." At first, he simply gave an account of what had happened to him (John 9:15), referring to Jesus as "the man."

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of being a sinner because he'd healed on the Sabbath, the man who had been blind defended him. "He is a prophet," he said, drawing the only conclusion he could from the evidence available to him.

When they pressed him, he appealed to his own experience: "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. I do know one thing: I was blind but now I see" (John 9:25). In contrast with his parents, who refused to speak out for fear of being thrown out of the synagogue, he admitted to being a follower of Jesus. "I have told you already and you did not listen," he said with exasperation. "Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" The more they attacked him, the firmer his conviction grew and the stronger his testimony became. "We know that God does not listen to sinners," he said. "He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (John 9:31-33).

When Jesus later identified himself to him, the man who had been blind responded with faith and reverence. "Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him" (John 9:38).

As I think of the man born blind, I think of Willa Myers, a friend who suffered a great deal in her life. She lost a leg in an auto accident as a teenager. She battled cancer. She cared for her husband through a long and painful terminal illness. But everywhere she went, even in the hospital, she praised God, using her life as an illustration of his providence. Jesus was a reality in her life. He saw her through, he lifted her up, he blessed her, and she witnessed to

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his greatness in her own experience. Her smiles, her songs, and her great heart encouraged those of us who knew her. Many came to Christ because of her witness, a witness to the power of God incarnate in the lives of his people.

Witness by Call

Finally, the woman at the well is an example of those who witness to Jesus by calling others to see him for themselves. This woman had an encounter with Jesus that caused her faith to bud. Jesus had recognized her potential, despite her sinful life, and she was grateful. So she hurried away to share her experience with the people of her town.

"Come," she urged them, "see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). Pack points out that the structure of this sentence indicates that she expected a negative answer but hoped for a positive one. Despite her doubts, her faith began to blossom. The woman at the well is noted for her enthusiasm. Once she met Jesus, she left her waterpot (the reason she had come to the well) and hurried back to town to share the news with her neighbors. She'd discovered something much more valuable and satisfying than well water—the living water that springs up to eternal life (4:10, 13-14).

She reminds me of Wynema McPherron. When Wynema became a Christian, she immediately began to share what she knew, and she grew quickly to be an inspiring teacher from both revelation and personal experience.

Although she often expressed her regret for not having known Christ earlier in her life, her joy at having found him and her dedication to living the rest of her life to his glory inspired all who knew her and added strength to her call to others to examine

his claims. New Christians are often the most enthusiastic witnesses to Jesus. Their knowledge and experience may be limited, but their enthusiasm more than compensates for any limitations. They are quick to invite their friends to worship and Bible study and to share what they have learned and experienced.

All three methods of witnessing—by revelation, by incarnation and by call—are effective in bringing people to Jesus.

We see it in scripture. When Jesus returned to the place where John had been baptizing, many were converted. Why? As they explained it, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true” (John 10:41). They believed his witness by revelation.

The testimony of the life of the man born blind was effective as well. When some of the Jews accused Jesus of being demon-possessed, others defended him, saying, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. How can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” The man’s life confirmed his words—making him an effective witness by incarnation.

Finally, the Samaritan woman was effective when she called the townspeople to come and see Jesus for themselves. “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did’” (John 4:39). As they responded to her invitation, however they spent time with Jesus. Then they told her, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Our Call to Witness

Just as the Word became flesh in a particular place and time in the person of Jesus and in the lives

of individuals—three from scripture and three from among my acquaintances, the Word should become flesh in us as well.

As God’s children, born of him (1:13), we should point out Jesus to our busy world distracted by work, money, relationships and insecurity. We should embody him before our friends and acquaintances, allowing our lives to witness to his power. And we should call others to come and see this one who has done so much for us and examine his claims for themselves.

We may be Bible scholars like Michio, able to share with many God’s revelation of himself through the written Word and the living Word. We may have had experiences in our lives in which we’ve been touched as Willa was, and we may be able to use our experiences as a personal testimony to others. Or we may be new Christians, like Wynema, limited in knowledge and experience, but able to share what we know and to encourage people to consider Christ for themselves.

Out of gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ, we should tell others, as these people did, humbly, honestly, courageously and enthusiastically, about Jesus, the Word. We can share God’s revelation from scripture and the person of Jesus. We can share our own experiences with Jesus. And we can encourage them to consider his claims for themselves.

We can’t give them our faith. They have to come to faith on their own. But we can spread the light and offer the living water to a world groping in darkness and thirsty for truth.

Billie Silvey is Associate Editor for **21st Century Christian Magazine** and Involvement Ministry Coordinator for the Culver Palms Church of Christ in Los Angeles.