

Massive Prayer Effort Focuses on New York City

The Call New York City will cap a national effort to recruit thousands to intercede for the city

Chaplain's Innovative Approach To Bible Spurs Inmates' Interest

Pleased with Steve Walker's success with state prisoners, Alabama now requires chaplains to teach Bible-based programs

New Zealand Minister Calls Church To Embrace 'Father's Heart' Message

James Jordan joins American Bible teachers Jack Frost and Jack Winter in pointing Christians to rediscover God's love

News Briefs

Not Your Average Action Hero

Willie Aames, once famous for his role on *Eight Is Enough*, now dons a cape and mask to play the Christian superhero known as Bibleman. Here's how he found faith while in Hollywood.

Sight & Sound

How Not to Lose Your Focus

While it's easy to list the many external diversions, our most fatal distraction lives within.

A frustrated New York attorney sits across from the "other woman," pleading for peace. He attempts to make restitution, to justify his one-night stand, to say something—anything—that will get this obsessed woman to leave him, his possessions and his family alone. But with cool deliberation, she simply replies, "I will not be ignored."

Though secular, this scene from a 1987 film contains spiritual

significance. The woman, obsessed in the pursuit of someone else's husband, is completely focused on her immoral mission.

How much more focused should we be in pursuing our divine destinies? For this character, only death was able to stop her. What is stopping you? While this woman had a fatal attraction, many Christians today suffer from fatal distractions.

Fatal distractions detour us from growing spiritually and fulfilling our purpose in life. And while it is easy to list the many external diversions that cause us to lose focus—busy schedules, difficult church people, lack of money, anthrax and bioterrorism—the disturbing reality is simply this: Our most fatal distraction lives within.

It's the person you see as you brush your teeth, the one who stares at you in the mirrored glass of corporate America, and the one who goes with you to pick the kids up after school. It's even the person who accompanies you to the office to prepare weekly sermons, and the one who intercedes in times of intense warfare.

As the 1950s political cartoon character Pogo stated: "We have met the enemy, and it is us."

The apostle Paul expressed the same sentiment as he closed Romans 7, lamenting: "I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free" (vv. 22-25, The Living Bible, emphasis added).

Often our fatal distractions are rooted in our minds. What else would explain King Saul's fatal distraction, the jealousy of his armor bearer, David? When the two returned from battling Goliath, women praised the war effort in song,

saying, “‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’” (1 Sam. 18:7, NKJV).

It was at that moment that Saul allowed the seed of distraction to awaken in his mind. “Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom? So Saul [jealously] eyed David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 18:8-9).

Like so many of us, Saul’s fatal distraction did not come from external forces. It wasn’t the women, David or even the lyrics of the song. Saul’s jealousy was his fatal distraction, and it caused him to disqualify himself from serving as king.

Saul is the only one who could have changed this negative thought process, and the same is true of us. If we do not truly believe what God has said about us, fatal distractions will come to weed out our faith.

What is distracting you from seeing yourself in the reflection and image of Christ? Is it doubt, a poor self-concept or lack of intimacy with Christ?

What do you really believe about yourself? What do you believe about your potential? Beyond your scripted, pat, religious response to friends or family, what do you truly believe about your service? As Proverbs 23:7 declares, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

If you’ve been fatally distracted, there is hope. God wants you to regain your focus and pursue His original plan for your life. To do that, you must stay faithful to the things of God and obey His Word. Stay committed to the call of God on your life, be unshaken in your faith and remain steadfast in your Christian walk.

Like the woman with the fatal attraction, doggedly pursue your

destiny. Instead of being fatally distracted, stay eternally focused on fulfilling His will.

Joyce Rodgers is founder of Primary Purpose Ministries in Denton, Texas. She is the youth department chairwoman for the Church of God in Christ.

Let's Support Israel

The bottom line is this: There is no such thing as "good terrorism."

God Is in Control

An 'I have to fix it myself mentality' leads to a plethora of physical and emotional troubles.

What Will You Risk to Be a Pioneer for God?

Until the church—the people of God—have explored all the ideas that are in the divine mind for the propagation of His kingdom in the earth, somebody must always be receiving new light and making new departures, and there has never been a single

instance in the history of the church in which this has been done without nearly the whole of that generation raising a hue and cry against it.

Yet how would it be possible for God to bring about a revolution—a true revival—a grand aggressive movement of Christianity, without giving new light and calling somebody to some path in advance of all that has gone before?

And what does it matter who? Whether it is Peter or John or Martin Luther or George Fox or John Wesley or William Booth? What does it matter, as long as God does it?

But this requires that somebody lead the way—go on in advance. Will you be content to go in advance? Will you endure the hardness of a pioneer? Can you bear the ridicule and gibes of your fellowman? Dare you go where the Holy Spirit leads and leave Him to look after the consequences?

If so, you will have a harvest of precious souls; you will shine as the stars forever; but if you draw back, His soul will have no pleasure in you. The Lord help you! Step out onto the divine love that alone is able among the waves to bear up your little boat—able to make you more than a conqueror. Oh, step out—follow, follow, follow—do not be afraid!

WALKING ALONE The only thing you must do is count the cost, for the possession of divine love often necessitates walking in a lonely path. Not merely in opposition and persecution, but alone in it. Jesus, who was the personification of divine love, stands out as our great example.

He was emphatically alone, and of the people there was none with Him. Even the disciples whom He had drawn nearest to Him and to whom He had tried to communicate most of His thought and spirit, were so behind that He often had to reprove them and to lament their obtuseness and lack of sympathy.

In the greatness of His love, Jesus had to go forward into the

darkness of Gethsemane. He was alone while the disciples slept, and then He went all alone to the Judgment Hall. He stood alone before Pilate. On the cross He hung unaccompanied—alone!

As it was with the Master, so it has been with all those whom God has called to go in advance of their race. It was so with Paul, and it has commonly been so with those whom God has called to extraordinary paths. For John to have a revelation of things shortly to come to pass, he had to go alone to the Isle of Patmos. For Paul to hear unspeakable words, he had to go alone into the third heaven and not be allowed even to communicate what he saw and heard when he came down. In advance of other saints, he of necessity had to go alone.

Similarly, when God has called some of His other followers to an out-of-the-way path, they have had to go alone. Superior love necessitates a lonely walk.

You shrink and say, "That seems hard." Yes, I know. The fact remains that superior love necessitates, in some measure, a lonely walk, because it is only they who thus love to whom the Lord tells His secrets. If you want to ask a confidential question and get a confidential answer, you must be on the bosom of your Master. You won't be able to do it at a distance.

Then when He gives to any soul superior light to its fellows, and that soul follows the light, it necessarily entails a path in advance of its fellows. Unless he can inspire and encourage them to follow, he must go on alone.

FACING OPPOSITION Peter faced this dilemma when God gave him the vision of the sheet with all its unclean contents and told him, "'Rise, Peter; kill and eat'" (Acts 10:13, NKJV). Peter understood from the vision that his own plan to reach the Jews with the gospel was not the fullness of God's plan for the extension of His kingdom and that God wanted him to go to the

Gentiles. He determined that his business was to follow the Lord's directions in spite of his own "ifs" and "buts," and he went on to carry out the divine direction.

The church, aghast, as usual, at anything new, was down on it. This new church—which had only just itself been brought to God by a new Savior, a new revelation, a new call and a new faith—was down on Peter and summoned him before a council to answer for his conduct (see Acts 11:1-3).

He told them about his vision in the truthful simplicity of a man of God, and thank God, they had sense enough—yes, and love enough—to accept his explanations and to glorify God (vv. 4-18). Would to God we could get as much sense and charity these days!

You see, the church tends to be down on all the Peters who dare to do anything out of the jog-trot line. You may reason ever so urgently and show them that the old measures are not enough for everybody, that there is a great mass of outlying population that they do not reach; you may show them that these new measures of yours are quite as lawful as their old measures, and that, probably, they would be a great deal more useful, and moreover, that they have been borne in upon you by the Holy Spirit and that you feel as if there is a fire in your bones urging you to go and try them; yet they will not hold their peace and glorify God but will loose their tongues and vilify you.

I wish people would stop and think that the path they are now standing in—the well-beaten track on which they are now walking with such slow dignity—was once quite as new and unconventional and outrageous to their forefathers' colleagues as the path that any new departure by the Holy Spirit may set before them now. They should read Neale's History of the Puritans and see amid what a hurricane of excitement, opposition, contempt and persecution their forefathers fought

for the very paths they are now standing still in and holding so sacred that they cannot have them disturbed.

If their forefathers had acted on the principles they are acting on, they would have stood still in old paths, and we would never have been in the new ones. These people stand in the paths of traditionalism and routinism, just where their forefathers left them, occupying all their time in admiring the wisdom and benevolence and devotion of their forefathers, instead of imitating their aggressive faith and marching on to the conquest of the world.

Will you throw yourself in with them? Or will you step out in front of the crowd and lead them down the path of true righteousness? For which is better: to let men be damned conventionally or to save them unconventionally?

Which is the most God-honoring? Which has the most common sense in it?

But it is now as it was in the days of the Son of Man—the church is full of those who “‘build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets”’” (Matt. 23:29-30). Jesus called such religious folk “hypocrites” (v. 29) and “serpents, brood of vipers” (v. 33) and said that they are “‘witnesses against [them]selves that [they] are sons of those who murdered the prophets’” (Matt. 23:29-31).

MOTIVATED BY LOVE How is this pharisaical attitude played out in the church today? Let’s take an illustration. Suppose we have a church that is going comfortably along and is just where it was 10 or 15 years ago, making up for deaths and departures, but not really growing.

We will suppose that a member of this church gets converted. He has the sense of his transgressions and unfaithfulness being taken away, and the joy of God’s salvation is restored

to his soul.

Now, in a moment—almost immediately, as in the case of Peter—as soon as the internal work is done, comes the external path opened up. The Spirit of God lays before him some new work, something strikes him that has been long forgotten or that never seems to have been recognized in his church.

He sees what a grand thing it would be for the conversion of souls and the extension of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and he feels it beginning to burn like a fire in his bones to enter this path of usefulness. He prays much over it and waits until he is fully satisfied that it is not a vain impulse but is of the Spirit of God.

Full of love, faith and zeal, he goes to talk to the leadership. He expects they will sympathize with his feelings and enter into his project; but alas, they begin by raising objections: “Well, but you see, that would be a little out of our order”; or “That is not exactly our way of doing things”; or “I am afraid the deacons would object.” And if he has the misfortune to be young—or a woman—they will completely suppress him with the dictate, “You must never presume to do anything of which we do not approve.”

Alas! The thousands of urgings of the Holy Spirit; the thousands of heavenly voices that have been as clear to human souls as ever Peter’s sheet was to him; the thousands of glorious aspirations and schemes for the spread of the kingdom that have been thus squashed!

But not all souls will be so easily put off. The possessor of divine love holds out, in spite of opposition, ingratitude and persecution. He seeks the good of all men, not merely because he ought but because he cannot help it. His heart is on the side of God and truth. He loves righteousness and therefore cannot desist from seeking to bring all beings to love it, too, although they hate and despise him for so doing.

Jesus held out in this glorious love, even in the agonies of crucifixion. “‘Father, forgive them,’” He said, “‘for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34). His heart was set on bringing man back to God, and He went through with it. His soul did not draw back, and His divine love constrained Him even unto death.

Do you have this divine love? Do you have enough of it to take you beyond your petty, selfish interests and your concerns about what other people will think to a place in front of the pack? Will you step out, all alone, and become a forerunner in your generation? If you do—if you will—you may be surprised at the revival God begins through you.

Read a companion devotional.

Catherine Booth (1829-1890) was co-founder with her husband, William, of The Salvation Army, as well as the mother of nine children and a much-sought-after, powerful preacher.