

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

Understanding God's Justice and the New Testament

BY TERRY TRAMEL

How Do You Respond When God Says 'No'?

BY DALE ADAMS

We Have More Work to Do to End Racism

BY DOUG BEACHAM

Why Don't We See More Women in Our Pulpits?

BY KAREN LUCAS

Women Belong on the Frontlines of Ministry

BY J. LEE GRADY



We Have More Work to Do to **END RACISM**



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At the 25th Anniversary of the “Memphis Miracle,” we were honest about the challenge.

No more walls: The Memphis Miracle anniversary was a call for unity.



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

The 25th commemoration of the historic “Memphis Miracle” occurred in March. IPHC leaders joined with the nearly 200 delegates of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) to thank God for the courage and humility demonstrated by Pentecostal leaders in 1994. I was honored to represent the IPHC there.

One of the key leaders of the historic event was the late IPHC Bishop B.E. Underwood.

(You can read more about the 1994 event [here](#)).

The celebration was held at the historic Mason Temple, the headquarters church of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in Memphis, Tennessee. The largest Pentecostal denomination in the USA, COGIC’s roots go back to the Azusa Street revival.

G.B. Cashwell, who was responsible for leading the IPHC family tree into Pentecost, met with COGIC founder Charles Mason. One of the notable aspects of Cashwell’s ministry was his recognition that the Spirit’s work at Azusa Street was a divine interruption into the racial divisions that has marked the USA since the 17th century.

During the service at Mason Temple on March 19, COGIC Presiding Bishop Charles Blake observed that during the Civil Rights era few white Pentecostals stood with blacks as they marched for full inclusion in American life. It was a sad moment as Blake, speaking the truth in love, mentioned that Jews, Methodists, and others stood with them, but his own Pentecostal brothers were absent.

I am careful to not be too harsh on that earlier generation. In our own time we struggle to know what to say and do. Publicly standing for justice is never easy. That’s because justice is so often mixed with cultural and political dynamics.

We worry that taking public stances will divide our churches; we worry that

public issues will become more important than evangelism; we worry that we will be criticized and even rejected (all three not without merit).

But there are times when standing for righteousness and justice are worth the costs. Then, and now, are such times. Bishop Blake spoke the truth in love about Pentecostal failures since Azusa Street, and his words have left me asking myself about the needed courage and wisdom for our times.

On that Tuesday night in Mason Temple, I was granted a few minutes to speak behind the same pulpit that the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood when he preached his last message on Wednesday night, April 3, 1968. As I prepared my remarks, the Holy Spirit led me on a personal journey reminding me of different places where my heart, my thinking and my actions were challenged. So, what follows below is a portion of the prepared remarks I gave in Memphis.

"We, as Pentecostals, have been on a journey since 1994. For most of us that journey goes even further and includes personal vignettes as well as our corporate experience.

In early March 1965, as a teenager in Georgia, I watched on television the violent response to the march in Selma, Alabama, that occurred 54 years ago on Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965.

Two more marches occurred that month, including the third on March 21, causing us to remember this significant event while we are here in Memphis. As a teenager, I was angered and grieved by what I saw of the violent racist attacks.

Little did I know that in 1985, the 20th commemoration of the March, I would be a U.S. Army Reserve Chaplain in a convoy returning from annual training in Mississippi

to Georgia in the middle of the traffic commemorating the March over the Selma bridge. I remember our African American soldiers, in uniform serving our nation, being cursed at and mocked by crowds of angry whites, with law enforcement sneering as they stood idly by.

Again, I was angered and grieved by what I saw and heard and that such racist anger remained.

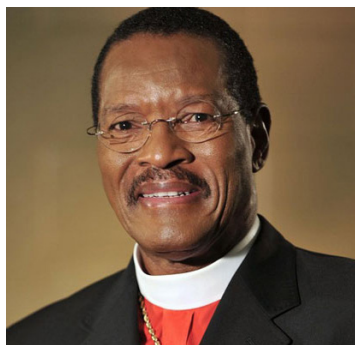
Responding to the obvious

injustices was easy. What I didn't know was how blind I remained to the hidden and subtle injustices that continue to plague us.

■ Not until a few years ago in a conference at the National Association of Evangelicals in Washington, DC did I learn of the systemic redlining of African American communities by banking institutions, intentionally denying them the services that most of us take for granted.

■ Not until a couple of years ago, through Christian Churches

Together, did I learn that "the talk" with our teenagers means something very different from white and black families. For most white families it's about the birds and the bees with our teenage children. For black families it's about what you do when stopped by the police.



Bishop Charles Blake of COGIC brought a sobering message in Memphis.

"Bishop Blake spoke the truth in love about Pentecostal failures since Azusa Street, and his words have left me asking myself about the needed courage and wisdom for our times."

Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

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■ A year ago, I learned from African Americans that this year, 2019, they are remembering the quad centennial of the first blacks coming to the English colony of Jamestown in 1619. I would have not made that connection on my own. I needed to be taught.

■ And even recently, with a PCCNA race relations resolution, it took me time to connect racism with poverty. While poverty affects people regardless the race, it took me time to comprehend that racism exacerbates poverty in ways I did not understand.

Thankfully, my colleagues at PCCNA quickly joined me in correcting an earlier statement in which I had ignorantly separated the two issues. It was corrected by instruction.

As Jesus touched a blind man twice, I am aware I need Jesus to touch me many times, so that I can see my brothers and sisters as He sees them, and we all can see better as Spirit-filled followers of Jesus.

The journey continues." □



Understanding **GOD'S JUSTICE** and the New Testament



BY TERRY
TRAMEL

DR. TERRY TRAMEL is an ordained minister in the IPHC. He served for 15 years as professor of Bible and Theology at Southwestern Christian University in Bethany, Oklahoma. At the beginning of 2017 he assumed the role as the director of Global Outreach and Leadership Development for World Missions Ministries. He holds a B.S. in Pastoral Ministry from Mid America Christian University in Oklahoma City, a M.A. in Theology from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, and a D. Min. in Pentecostal Leadership from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. He is the author of *The Beauty of the Balance: Toward an Evangelical-Pentecostal Theology*. He and his wife Beckie live in Norman, Oklahoma. They have two adult children.

Justice is a primary theme in the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. In the earliest stage of His ministry, Jesus announced that His mission was going to be directed toward the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). This inaugural address provided a signal that Christ's heart would be toward the lost, the least, and the last.

Many Bible readers fail to grasp the importance that the Scriptures place on justice. One of the reasons for this involves the Greek term *dikaiosune*. Most English translations, including the beloved King James Version, render this word as "righteousness."

However, a strong case may be made that "justice" is the better term to use in a number of passages. For example, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He expresses this language over a half a dozen times, therefore making justice a dominant theme of His discourse. Consider these examples:

- Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall be filled."
- Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for justice's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- Matthew 6:20: "For I say unto you, that except your justice shall exceed the justice of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."
- Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."

This reading provides clarity to Matthew's overarching message about the kingdom that Jesus brings. The Lord's words in that initial discourse and His subsequent ministry provide a glimpse of what His kingdom should look like in a world in which it is often not visible.

It is no wonder that Jesus' recorded life included so many examples of ministry to those who were on the margins of society. His sense of justice not only extended to women in general, it reached to a Canaanite woman who sought Him on behalf of her sick daughter (Matthew 15:21-28) and to a Samaritan woman whom He encountered in need (John 4).

Jesus not only touched ostracized lepers, He specifically touched a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:16). He not only ministered to a thief, He redeemed a dying thief (Luke 23:32-33).

It is this caring for the poor, the abused and abandoned, the ill and the immigrants, the widows and orphans, that constitutes justice in Christ's kingdom. Those who hunger and thirst for it will receive, and those who show such mercy to others will be granted it themselves (see Matthew 5:6-7).

According to Jesus, justice is not only for the oppressed who need it and His followers who show it, it will also be meted out to those who oppose it and withhold it from others.

The Virgin Mary expressed this sentiment in part of her response to the news that she would give birth to the long-awaited Messiah. Luke 1:52-53 says: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

This prophetic utterance summarizes the kind of justice that King Jesus will ultimately bring. There will eventually be an inversion of status—the rich will be brought down and the victims of injustice will be elevated. Christ's indictment against the rich is not toward all who are wealthy; rather it extends to those who gained their wealth by trampling down others and who refuse to use it to help the suffering of others.

This sense of everyone receiving proper justice is brought out in Jesus' story about the rich man who selfishly lived in extravagance while Lazarus dwelt in poverty and pain (see Luke 16:19-31). It was at death that the inversion of their status took place, for the rich man went to hell while Lazarus arrived in paradise.

Jesus was showing us that, for multiplied millions of people, true justice will only come when we step into eternity.

Jesus again emphasized this truth in His last sermon, known as the Olivet Discourse. His Parable about the Shepherd dividing the sheep and the goats speaks vividly to His standard of justice. Here He portrayed the great separation in eternity being determined by how people responded to the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners

(Matthew 25:31-46). Those who ministered to them will be granted entrance into His future kingdom while those who did not will be banished.

The New Testament makes it clear that we are not to be content with just waiting for the Lord's return to bring justice to this earth. The epistle of James declares that the church has a responsibility to live now as we will then in

"It is no wonder that Jesus' recorded life included so many examples of ministry to those who were on the margins of society."

the coming kingdom of our Savior.

James only mentions the Lord twice by name in all his five chapters. However, there are over a dozen references to the Sermon on the Mount and the theme of justice is echoed on every page. James warns against showing favoritism toward the rich, while mistreating the poor (1:9-10; 2:1-10; 5:1-6). He admonishes believers to demonstrate "works" along with their faith, specifically citing taking care of the hungry and destitute (2:14-18).

In a single statement he captures the essence of justice in this manner: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Finally, the Book of Revelation confirms that justice will be eternally established at the consummation of all things. Here we read that everyone at the Great White Throne will be judged "according to the works they have done" (Revelation 20:11-12).

Additionally, the hour is coming when God Himself will wipe away all the tears from the redeemed who will live forever without sorrow, pain, or death (see Revelation 21:4).

There is one last scene that merits our attention in the Apocalypse. Consider Revelation 15:2-3: "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

This amazing anthem is a fitting tribute to the justness of God Himself. John the revelator saw a company of victors in heaven who had been put to death by a coming world ruler. Moments later he hears them singing a triumphant song that includes lyrics praising the Lord for His works and ways.

None of these martyrs are blaming God or asking Him why they had to suffer so on earth. On the contrary, they are extolling Him because His ways are "just and true." One day, all the saved from every generation who experienced injustice on the earth will worship the Lord and proclaim that the King was and is faithful and true, even in the midst of their difficulties.

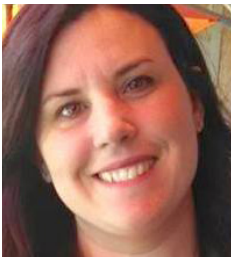
Until then, every act of mercy from the Lord or His followers serves as a foretaste of His coming kingdom when it will be on earth just as it is in heaven. □



Why Don't We See More **WOMEN** in Our Pulpits?

Early Pentecostals always embraced women preachers.

What happened?



BY KAREN
LUCAS

REV. KAREN LUCAS is the director of Archives and Research for the North Carolina Conference of the IPHC. She is currently studying at Campbell University Divinity School to receive her M.Div. while also serving as an assistant to her church history professor. Karen fills the position of director of Youth and Children's Ministries at Divine Street United Methodist Church. Karen lives in Falcon, N.C., with her husband, Chip, and their three children.

When I was a young woman I had an unsettling experience after being invited to another church to sing. Before my solo, I began sharing thoughts about the song. Suddenly, a man came up behind me, placed his hands on my shoulders and pushed me to the side.

I thought this man was trying to prevent me from tripping over a microphone cord. But then he shoved me down the steps, saying, "You cannot stand here. If you need a music stand, I'll get you one." I sang and sat down.

Later, I learned that this church believed that women should not preach to men. They thought it was wrong for me to speak about my faith, and they felt it was especially offensive when I did so from their pulpit. I have never been able to forget how it felt to have a man shove me off a church platform.

Although this experience happened in a Baptist church, it caused me to become more aware of how women are treated in all sorts of churches, including the IPHC. Unfortunately, my experience was not that unusual. Today, many across the Pentecostal world are asking, "Where are the women pastors and preachers?"

Early Pentecostals and Holiness believers welcomed the ministry of women. Our history shines with stories of many bold, articulate women. Catherine Booth, for example, sat in the balcony as her husband, William, was challenged by the Methodist church in England for his unconventional ministry to the poor. When William was asked to change his ways, he looked up for Catherine.

She famously shouted back, "Never!" Then, he motioned her to the door where they embraced and walked out together. Their Salvation Army thrived, and Catherine became an able writer, teacher, leader and preacher in the movement.

Catherine had been influenced by another woman who gave shape to the Holiness movement—Pheobe Palmer. Palmer had grown up as a devout Methodist and didn't doubt her salvation, but she longed for more. Finally, Phoebe read the words of Jesus from Matthew 23:19, "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?"

At once, she realized that she had failed to understand the need to place herself on the altar. Once Phoebe grasped this, she began to teach and preach about it with conviction. Although some criticized her for assuming a role as a spiritual leader, she became the mother of the holiness movement.

Amanda Berry Smith broke through barriers of gender, class, and race in the middle of the nineteenth century to proclaim holiness to all who would listen. Amanda was born a slave and when, as a free woman, she received her call to preach, she was confronted with many obstacles. Many male ministers questioned her calling.

Nevertheless, Smith persisted and was finally given opportunity to preach. A revival ensued that lasted for weeks and spread 20 miles. To her, it seemed that God was putting his seal of approval upon her ministry. She rose from within the African Methodist Episcopal Church but was soon preaching across denominations and around the world.

Almost half a century later, Rev. William Seymour labored in prayer with a small group of Christians in Los Angeles. They believed in Pentecostal power, but they had not yet received it. Finally, William asked one of his mentors, Pastor Lucy Farrow, for help. Farrow had experienced tongues, but William Seymour had not. He hoped that she could help him.

At Seymour's request, Farrow came to Los Angeles and began to minister alongside him. Within a few days, she honored the request of a man who asked her to lay hands on him and pray that he would receive his Spirit baptism.

Farrow waited until she sensed the leading of the Holy Spirit. When she finally prayed for him, he fell to the floor praising God, speaking in tongues and testifying that he had received his Spirit baptism. That was the beginning of the Azusa Street Revival.

When we see the powerful way God worked through women in our history, it's not surprising to learn that the IPHC has licensed women for ministry since it began. Women have always been welcomed onto the mission field, into the Sunday school classroom, behind the piano, and even behind the pulpit.

Many of our churches were planted by women. Yet, present day churches are less likely to welcome women into pastoral roles.

What caused this gap between what we believe and what we practice? I suspect some of it is partially due to ecclesiastical shifts that occurred during the 1950s and 1960s when Pentecostals sought more widespread acceptance into mainstream Protestant culture. Male pastors were dominant in that world.

The next blow came in the 1970s and 1980s when movements outside of classical Pentecostalism began infiltrating the theology of some laity and leaders. These movements, in reaction to liberal feminism, emphasized the belief that men were to lead while women were to submit to men, stay quiet, and have lots of babies.

During this time, Pentecostal theologies that celebrated the work of the Spirit in both men and women received less attention. Those that promoted male leadership gained sway. As a result, young people in Pentecostal denominations rarely saw women preach or pastor.

Since there were fewer female role models serving as preachers and pastors, it likely became hard for young people to imagine women filling those roles. I think it may have become more difficult for congregations to imagine being pastored by a woman, too.

By 1996, some Pentecostals saw that efforts to silence women were wrong. The IPHC held a Solemn Assembly at Northwood Temple in Fayetteville, N.C., calling the church to repent for seven deadly sins. One of them was the sin of male dominance. Although I was too

young to understand how deep the sin of male dominance was, I heard the words, "We repent."

Just as we work out our salvation, we must also walk out our repentance. Repentance requires admission of guilt and a change in behavior. It is turning away from the wrong path and fixing our eyes on the right path.

The Holy Spirit is at work among us, stirring a new generation of women who will not bend to human principles that contradict their godly call to pulpit and pastoral ministry. There is also a generation of men awakening who will clear the way for them.

I see spiritual fathers and mothers who will take these women by the hand and walk with them. If ever there was a time for prophetic, priestly, evangelistic, pastoral voices of Spirit-filled women to once again be released into this world, it is now. Here are some ways that we can all help.

"Given both our history and our doctrine, it is hard to understand why so few women today show up behind the pulpit to preach."

- ▲ Larger churches can seek to fill associate pastor positions with women.
- ▲ Senior pastors can open their pulpit regularly and give women the opportunity to develop their preaching skills.
- ▲ Pastors can be more intentional about cultivating ministerial calls of girls and women.
- ▲ Leaders who organize conferences can plan for women to preach and teach.
- ▲ We can require internships before issuing ministerial licenses and create mentoring programs that put women on more equal footing with men.

We are a priesthood of believers with a history to be proud of. Let us remember who we are and keep gaining ground, together, for the sake of the gospel! ☐



Why Women Belong on the **FRONT LINES** of Ministry

The IPHC must help a new generation of women step into their ministry callings.



BY J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an author, traveling minister and former editor of *Charisma* magazine. Author of several books including *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* and *Set My Heart on Fire*, Lee leads The Mordecai Project—a missionary organization that focuses on bringing the healing of Christ to women who are abused and marginalized. Lee has been ordained in the IPHC since 2000, and he and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia. You can learn more about his ministry at leegrady.com.

Two years ago my oldest daughter, Margaret, quietly made history. She was ordained as a pastor at her church in South Carolina where her husband, Rick, served as an associate pastor for several years. Margaret and another woman were the first females to be ordained into pastoral ministry at this church.

As Margaret's father I couldn't be prouder. I have watched her spiritual anointing develop since she was a little girl—and later when she went to the IPHC's Emmanuel College, where she served for four years as associate campus chaplain after her graduation in 2008.

It was really at Emmanuel College that Margaret's spiritual gifts blossomed. She preached, led small groups, mobilized overseas mission trips, and trained students to do local outreach. I'm grateful that my daughter benefitted from the IPHC's historic commitment to empowering women in ministry. But I'm also aware that the road won't be easy for her or for any woman who embraces the call to leadership.

Thankfully, Margaret's home church in South Carolina fully embraced the ordination of women—as did the Wesleyan university where she later served as a staff chaplain. But there are hundreds of thousands of churches today that limit women's gifts by enforcing a spiritual glass ceiling that was actually shattered long ago on the day of Pentecost.

I've been a vocal advocate for women in ministry since my book *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* was published 19 years ago. The IPHC's pro-women stance is actually one of the major reasons I decided to affiliate with the IPHC; I knew that

this denomination has historically embraced the ministry of women since its earliest days.

I have helped many pastors remove the traditional barriers to women, and I've encouraged countless women to fully embrace God's unique calling—even when this requires scary steps of faith into uncharted territory. But here I will simply list three simple yet powerful reasons why it's imperative that the IPHC release women like never before. We must help a new generation of women step into their ministry callings!

1. We need a woman's perspective in the pulpit.

In New Testament times, the apostle Paul traveled with his colleagues Aquila and Priscilla. They helped lay the foundations of the early church, and in one scene in Acts 18:24-26, we see them instructing Apollos and launching him into ministry. Priscilla co-labored with Paul to build the first churches. She was not sidelined or silent. She was powerful and apostolic.

Paul was surrounded by women leaders who taught the Bible, prophesied, led churches, served as deacons, and died as martyrs. Besides Priscilla, he mentions in his letters several female ministry companions including Chloe, Phoebe, Euodia, Syntyche, Junia, Nympha, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis. Beyond that, the evangelist Philip had four daughters who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and John's second epistle is addressed to a woman who led a congregation (2 John 1, 13).



A feminine voice for biblical justice:
Margaret Grady Turner

If women had this level of influence in the first century—at a time when women were typically treated like property—how much freer should women be to preach today? If God's image is reflected in both male and female, as Genesis 1:26-28 tells us, why wouldn't we need both male and female to reveal His truth from the pulpit? If a healthy family needs both a father and a mother to provide nurture and instruction, doesn't the church also need spiritual fathers and mothers?

2. Spiritual gifting is not tied to gender.

In many evangelical churches today, women are told their "role" is to serve as wife, mother and domestic servant—and that men have the "role" of leadership. Women are told that preaching, pastoring, teaching and even leading worship are "masculine" gifts, while "feminine" gifts consist of teaching children, prayer, cooking, cleaning and secretarial work. But this sexist view is rooted in macho pride, not in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit's gifts have nothing to do with gender. The Spirit distributes His gifts "as He wills" (see 1 Cor. 12:11b, NASB). The nine manifestations of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and the motivational gifts listed in Romans 12 have no reference to gender whatsoever.

I love to remind people that when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the flames that manifested in the Upper Room were not pink for women and blue for men. The same powerful fire ignited both men and women!

Women can heal the sick. Women can cast out demons. Women can show mercy. Women can preach and teach. We limit and grieve the Holy Spirit when we tell Him who can and cannot function in His gifts!

3. Certain battles won't be won without women's influence.

There are many times in Scripture

"We need both Aquila and Priscilla to build a healthy church. We will continue to lose certain battles until women are trained, empowered and commissioned to engage the enemy."

when a woman determined the outcome of a battle. Jael dealt the final blow against Sisera in Judges 4:21; the "certain woman" of Judges 9:53 crushed Abimelek's skull; and Esther stopped Haman's genocide plot. If women are supposed to sit on the sidelines while men do all the important work, why are these stories in the Bible?

The truth is that God calls both men and women into ministry. We need the contributions of both Aquilas and Priscillas to build a healthy church. We will continue to lose certain battles until women are trained, empowered and commissioned to engage the enemy.

Last fall I was in a church in the Atlanta area listening to my daughter Margaret preach a sermon about fighting injustice. Her text was Psalm 45.

As she shared passionately about why she adopted an African child and how she traveled to India to fight gender-based violence, I wept—not because my daughter was preaching, but because I could hear God's voice thundering out of the heart of a 32-year-old mother who cares about the poor and the mistreated.

Sometimes it takes a woman to reflect God's heart. I hope we will do everything we can to mobilize and train more of our sisters to work in the harvest. Instead of standing in their way, let's push them into their purpose. □

How Do You Respond When God Says 'NO'?



Life is difficult when God doesn't answer a prayer.
But I will learn to trust Him.



BY DALE
ADAMS

DALE ADAMS, with his wife, Debi, live in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, where he serves as pastor of LifeSpring Christian Church. He also presides as bishop of River of Life Ministries of the IPHC. In his spare time he loves spending time with young couples, playing golf with his wife, and touring on his motorcycle. His book, *Soul Healer*, is designed to help ministry leaders and is available for purchase from Amazon.

Life is difficult! Those words appear at the beginning of the book, *The Road Less Traveled*, by M. Scott Peck. By nature, I am an optimist. It's easy for me to see the good, even in tough circumstances. But I've come through a few situations lately that caused even me to say, "Life is difficult!"

A few months ago I received the joyful news that our worship leader was expecting a baby. This young couple had tried in vain for a couple of years to get pregnant. There were numerous times of counseling and encouragement with this precious couple. There were lots of tears and lots of prayers. But now, all those tears were forgotten.

This couple then entered into that euphoric time when they were considering baby names and preparing a nursery. They were planning a baby shower and the wife was relaying to her friends and family every tiny movement by the little man in her womb.

Then at 21 weeks they lost the baby. Instead of rejoicing over a newborn son, they were holding a tiny stillborn child in their hands.

Life is difficult!

More recently, we lost two really great men in our church. Both were in their early 60s, far from the biblical promise of 70 years. They had loving wives and adoring grandchildren.

These men were strong believers, full of faith and pillars in our

church. I admired them both and I'm having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that they are now in heaven. Their homegoing leaves us with a lot of questions.

As a corporate body, we prayed, fasted and believed for their recovery. But in the end, it seemed like death won. I know that death is not the end. But it sure feels like a kick in the gut when death comes.

Life is difficult!

So, let's get real for just a moment. How do we respond when God says "no" to our prayers? Do we throw a temper tantrum and demand our way? Do we whine or complain? Do we accuse God of being unjust, or worse yet, unloving?

We've probably done all the above, and more. But let me share a little secret. A "no" from God reveals far more about our heart than a "yes." It's easy to get happy about a "yes" because we get the desire of our hearts. But an unanswered prayer is always questioned.

We hate "nos." Not because we simply didn't get what we wanted, but because the "no" exposes what's really in our heart. A "no" uncovers those dark, hidden areas of our soul where things like pride, selfishness or mistrust try to hide.

When we get a "no!" from a boss, a spouse, a co-worker or a friend, what is the first thought that races through your mind? You might try to justify your request, or you may try to swallow a few choice words.

One of the first things we all do is wonder why our request was denied. Or, we look at ourselves and ask, "What did I do to deserve this refusal?" As humans, we say "no" for a lot of wrong reasons. Our "nos" might stem from selfishness, pettiness, greed or simply not understanding.

But God's "nos" always have a reason. He is not selfish, petty, vindictive, cruel, uncaring or unknowing. God says "no" because "yes" would have been the wrong answer. And God cannot be wrong!

How many times do you think David prayed to stop being pursued by Saul and his army? How many times did Joseph ask God to release him from prison? How often did Sarah petition God for a child?

How often did Paul ask God to remove his "thorn in the flesh"? All these great heroes of the faith received a "no" from God. Some got a "no" with the promise of a "yes" in the future. They had to be



"God says 'no' because 'yes' would have been the wrong answer. And God cannot be wrong!"

patient during a long waiting period. But others got a flat out, absolute, resounding "no!"

We have to look at things from God's perspective. He is far above our circumstances. He sees the big picture. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Our puny, limited brains will never understand the lofty ways of God. The reason we struggle so much with a "no" is that we are trying to figure out the reason for the "no." If we could understand the "no," it would make it easier to accept.

Remember when you were a teenager (or if you are a teenager now), and you asked your parents if you could borrow the car or go on a trip with friends? When you heard the word "no," the very next thing out of your mouth was, "Why?" And what was the answer you got that drove you crazy?

Sometimes our parents would say: "Because I said so!"

When we get a "no" from God it is because He said so. He does not ask us to understand—because we can't. He does not expect us to necessarily like it (because we really can't). But, He does expect us to trust Him!

And that is where life on earth gets real. When we buck against a "no," our attitude reveals a tiny (or not so tiny) level of mistrust in God. If we really believed God is good all the time, if we really knew that God has our best interest at heart, and if we really understood the depth of His love for us, we would simply accept His response.

I will probably never comprehend a stillborn child or a premature death. I will remain forever perplexed when the Bible says, "The prayer of faith will heal the sick," yet the sick person I pray for is not healed. I may never understand the "no" of God, but I can trust His heart. I can learn to walk in the truth that "all things work together for good."

I can hold on to His promise: "He knows the plans He has for me ... plans to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future." And I can strive to put all my trust in His undying love for me, in His overwhelming omniscience, and in His ever-watchful eye over my life.

As we learn to trust Him more, His "no" will give evidence of His great love for us, even when we don't understand. □