

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

Four Powerful Steps To Fight Injustice

BY BILL SCHWARTZ

Don't Avoid God's Call
To Care About Justice

BY DOUG BEACHAM

An Open Letter to
Young Leaders of
the IPHC

BY J. LEE GRADY

Your Church Can
Speak For
Those With
No Voice

BY CHRIS FRIEND

In This Era of Division,
We Must Be Unified

BY RUSSELL BOARD



A man in a dark suit and white shirt is holding a rectangular wooden sign. The sign has the words "I DON'T CARE!" printed in large, bold, black capital letters. The man's face is partially visible at the top of the frame, and his hands are holding the sign from the left side. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**I DON'T
CARE!**

Don't Avoid God's Call to Care About **JUSTICE**

In a world of privilege, it's easy to think justice is someone else's responsibility.



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](#).

Preachers usually take time to pray over our sermons because we want to make certain we are hearing the Word of God accurately. We want to clearly convey that Word to our listeners.

So imagine if in your prayerful preparation the Holy Spirit tells you to stand up and call women in your congregation “cows.” Suppose you preached to them: “You cows who do nothing but graze and eat at the expense of others.”

I can tell you that several things will occur if you say that! One, everyone will be awake and will be ready to get up and leave, especially the women! Two, if you're the pastor, you might want to think about where your next job will be. Three, you can expect a call from your conference bishop. (And those reading this can probably add additional responses!)

Strangely enough, that is exactly what God told the Israelite prophet Amos to say. He says in Amos 4:1: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring wine, let us drink!’”

Amos was a sheep breeder in the northern kingdom called Israel (sometimes referred to as Samaria or Ephraim in the prophets). Like his contemporary Hosea, who was also in the northern kingdom, and his contemporary Isaiah, who preached in Judah, Amos saw the injustice and perversion of worship that corrupted the people of God.

Here are some of the prophetic warnings and judgements that Amos preached to Israel:

Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

September 2019

Vol. 6 No. 8

Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Executive Editor

J. Lee Grady

Communications Director /

Associate Editor

Janese Bennett

Copy Editor

Deborah Delk Grady

Discipleship Ministries

Thomas H. McGhee

World Missions Ministries

J. Talmadge Gardner

Evangelism USA

Garry Bryant

**Clergy Development /
World Intercession Network**

Lou Shirey

Encourage is published monthly except in July and December by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, P.O. Box 12609, Oklahoma City, OK 73157. Digital subscriptions are available free of charge by subscribing at iphc.org/connect. Images courtesy of adobestock.com unless otherwise noted.

1. Israel abused the poor and engaged in rampant sexual immorality (Amos 2:6, 7)
2. Israel commanded God's prophets to stop prophesying (2:12)
3. Israel set up idolatrous worship in Bethel and Gilgal (3:14)
4. Israel thought that "the day of the Lord" would mean that God would judge the nations, not realizing the judgment was upon her (5:18-20)
5. Israel let her worship music take the place of just and righteous actions (5:23, 24).

Look again at Amos 4:1 and see the audacity of calling out the wives of the rich and famous in Israel. Their husbands practiced the oppression of the poor that led to the wealth and privilege these women enjoyed in their finery. It did not matter to them who suffered at their expense, as long as they had their fill of the best things in life.

Lest anyone reading this think that Amos, or I, are picking on women, that is not the case. The men and women were all responsible for the corruption in the land. Amos addressed them because the comfortable women thought they had no role, no guilt and no responsibility for the corruption that was destroying their land. They had a sense of privilege but no sense of responsibility.

Privilege. It's a loaded word today in our social and political discourse. The New King James Version does not use this word. But the reality is present.

You can see it in 1 Kings 21, where the Israelite king Ahab uses

his status and privilege to murder Naboth and steal his property. You can see it in the life of Judah's king, David, who takes another man's wife as his own and then arranges the murder of the man to cover his own sin.

You can see it in Acts 5, where Ananias and Sapphira hold back part of the proceeds of the sale of property rather than give the previously declared total. You see it in 3 John 9, where a man in the church named Diotrephes "loves to have the preeminence." In the 3 John passage, preeminence literally means "loves to be first."

That sort of makes me nervous when I realize that!

The issue is not whether there is privilege for some people; there clearly is. Privilege gets you into certain universities, gets you

certain jobs and gets you invited to certain parties. If you remove privilege from one group of people, you simply move it to another group. There will always be privilege.

Many of us as followers of Jesus have privileges of wealth, security and opportunity of which we are not even conscious. In many instances those are the result of hard work, diligence and the blessings of God. So the issue is not whether or not we may have certain privileges. Rather, the issue is our awareness of justice, mercy and responsibility related to those privileges.

If my privilege has come at the expense

of others, as was the case with Amos' "cows of Bashan," then we have a responsibility to be aware of injustice. This is not because of any political philosophy, laws or commentators. It is because God has placed His church in the world to be a light to the nations.

"You and I may have privilege, but we do not use our blessings to oppress others. We live justly and responsibly before others as a witness to the glory of the God."

Four Powerful Steps to **FIGHT INJUSTICE**



We can't right every wrong. But your church can take simple steps that will make a big difference.



BY BILL
SCHWARTZ

BILL and Gretchen **SCHWARTZ** serve as IPHC missionaries in Belgium. They began serving in missions in 2002. They are the founding pastors of The Bridge Church, an international church near Brussels. They also serve as presidents of Logos Bible School and as superintendents of Crosspoint Réseau des Ministères, the IPHC Conference of Belgium. Their passion is to make disciples, train leaders and plant new churches.

Imagine being a young lady who is kidnapped and then manipulated into a marriage because a young man finds her attractive. This happens almost every day in Kyrgyzstan. Although “bride stealing” is illegal, it’s still considered culturally acceptable.

Contrary to popular belief, most young women involved in human trafficking are not kidnapped. Most are convinced by family members to enter into such a life to provide income for their families. The families are often paid by recruiters to convince their daughters, sisters and nieces to say yes to such a life.

There are children in this world who don’t have adequate access to education, food, clothing or even the simplest and modest privileges of children from the western world. This leads to limited cognitive, emotional and behavioral development. Poverty is the cause. Just this week we were told a story of a five-year-old girl who died from malaria in East Africa—even though there are inexpensive medications that can treat malaria.

All of these situations happen every day and all have one thing in common: The victims are innocent, and their demise is of no fault of their own. They are simply born in the wrong place and into unfortunate circumstances.

They have no access to justice.

God’s heart has always been to defend those who are less fortunate. In Isaiah 1, the Lord calls for Judah to repent. In verse 16 He instructs them to cleanse themselves and to “cease to do evil.” Then God gives them a mandate in verse 17: “Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (NKJV).

Allow me to contextualize this according to the time we live in. It is not enough that we are born-again and have insured ourselves eternity with Jesus. It’s also not enough that we have stopped living in a destructive and sinful way, or that we are regular worshipers in our houses of worship. We must also value what God values.

What does He value? People. Specifically, God cares about people in need. He cares for those who are discriminated against, persecuted and forgotten. Ken Wytmsa, founder of The Justice Conference, made this statement that deeply impacted my understanding of justice: “Doing justice is promoting what ought to be, and fighting injustice is fighting what should not be.”

Jesus stood for “what should be” and fought against “what should not be.” His mission is now the responsibility of the church. As His followers we are to preach the gospel, bring healing physically and emotionally, and liberate those who are being held captive. Jesus made His purpose clear while reading Isaiah 61. He said in Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

Although we believe Jesus is the answer and we are to advance His kingdom as the solutions to life’s problems, it’s not always that simple. The reality is there is a difference between “justice”—what should be according to the heart of God—and “truth”—what is actually happening.

Homelessness, poverty, genocide, human trafficking, war, refugees and persecution are the norm in so many places. The truth is not all people have the same opportunities in life and many find solutions to their problems through dysfunctional and destructive means.

It might seem impossible to change the truth we see around the world. However, we as His representatives can make a difference. How can we be voices for justice in this dark world? Here are three simple steps:

1. CHOOSE TO SEE WHAT GOD SEES.

You don’t have to look far to find people in need. We also don’t need an audible voice from God to help those in need. The Word is clear about the role the church should take in this world.

In Luke 10 there is a story about a man who was attacked, robbed and left for dead. In this parable a priest and a Levite walked by this man and did nothing to help. However, a Samaritan not only saw the man, but he stopped to help him.

If we are ever going to stand for justice, we must stop ignoring the problem and become the answer. The priest and Levite chose to ignore the problem. The Samaritan saw what God saw.

We have to see what God sees. It’s easy to get caught up in our own challenges. Unfortunately, leaders will often only engage when it benefits their dreams or passion. When we see what God sees, we then realize it’s not about our kingdom; it’s all about His.

2. DON’T GET OVERWHELMED.

Some people look at the injustice in the world and say, “I can’t make a dent in these problems!” The reality is God has not called you to right every wrong in the world. However, He has called you to do something.

When my wife, Gretchen, and I were youth pastors in a small community in North Florida, there was a high dropout rate for high school students. We decided to start a GED sponsorship program. We picked young people up

“Begin with what you have and realize that God uses small beginnings to make a big impact!”

from their homes, took them to the GED program at the school, met with their teachers and provided lunch for them. This was a simple, yet effective contribution to solving a problem. Start by choosing one problem and make a difference!

3. USE WHAT YOU HAVE.

Recently a missionary family that had spent 33 years serving in multiple African countries visited us. Their assignment was to train leaders and see new churches planted. The wife of the family was heartbroken from the poverty and malnourishment of the children.

This couple didn’t have the resources to feed everyone. However, the wife said, “I have three rocks and a pot.” They built a fire, set the pot on the rocks and made porridge. This small act of faith eventually led to a major ministry that is feeding more than 1,500 children every day.

We can all look at what we don’t have. But what do you have that can make a difference? Begin with what you have and realize that God uses small beginnings to make a big impact!

4. NETWORKING IS POWERFUL.

My wife works regularly with victims of human trafficking in Belgium. This has led others from our church to get involved. We didn’t start this ministry. In fact, we were not equipped or trained to do so, but we met an organization that works with women of all ages in the city of Antwerp.

Over the years women who were involved in prostitution have been saved. Many of them found new jobs so they could leave this demoralizing life. It’s been a great partnership for our church. The other ministry provides training, we provide manpower and resources, and God gets the glory! It’s amazing what can happen when you don’t care who gets the credit.

Begin to look at the needs in your community and beyond. Find organizations that are credible and partner with them. Support missionaries who are passionately working to be an answer to someone’s problem. Send short-term teams to be a support to these efforts. The power of networking is unlimited and can make a huge difference.

I have learned this powerful truth over the years. Small steps of faith eventually lead to big steps. When you partner with God’s heart to change the world, the world will never be the same! □



Your Church Can Speak for Those With **NO VOICE**

How can your church fight for justice? We learned these lessons in Australia.



BY CHRIS
FRIEND

CHRIS FRIEND is the national leader of the IPHC in Australia and the senior pastor of Collective Hope, a cluster of congregations in Perth. He has a Master of Arts in Theology and is an adjunct lecturer at Harvest Bible College. He and his wife, Natalee, have two children. Chris is passionate about Jesus, the Bible, leadership, people, architecture, kayaking and fast cars (not necessarily in that order.)

If you had asked me five years ago what I thought about ministry to people with disabilities, I could have answered in terms of theory but I would have struggled to speak about much practice. Sure, we had ministered to some families who had particular needs over the years, but there was nothing remarkable about that.

But over the past few years God has done something truly remarkable in this area of our ministry. I would like to share it with you.

In 2018, Collective Hope—a part of IPHC Australia—launched a ministry called Collective Hope Disability Services. For us, it was the logical development of things that we had been doing over the preceding years.

Like many other churches, we had been involved in ministering to homeless people and those coming in and out of prison and drug rehabilitation centers. But we soon realized that God was highlighting to us the needs of those with disabilities. And as we opened up our eyes to see this, we came to realize how many doors He was opening for us!

Here in Australia, the federal government has a number of ways of supporting those with disabilities, including a scheme called NDIS. One of our key pastors, Dale Ross, came to me with information he had received about this program. He had been told that we would qualify with the government effort and that we had been encouraged to apply. So we did.

Later on, another one of our pastors came to me with a comment about the application itself. He told me that we, as a church, had received a prophecy about

this a number of years ago. I told him that couldn't be the case. Surely I would remember a prophecy like that!

Well, it turned out he was right and my memory was short. He came back to me a few days later with that very prophecy, showing us that God had been leading us down this path far longer than we had realized.

Now, we are thankful to announce that we have received approval to be a service provider, and we are now providing services to people with disabilities as they need them. Alongside our Disability Services ministry, we also have a community outreach called House of Hope, which provides some valuable overlap.

In light of the theme of justice for IPHC in 2019, we have learned three important things:

1. JUSTICE IS A VERB.

For many Christians, justice is something we say that we believe in. But it is usually inconvenient to fight for people who don't have the strength to do it for themselves. We are the ones who step in on their behalf.

For example, it might be easy to provide food and clothes for homeless people, but it is inconvenient to become an advocate for them. What God has been reminding us as a denomination, all year long, is that despite the inconvenience, justice is something that we must act on.

Of all the Bible verses on justice, Micah 6:8 is the one that stands out the most to me. It's almost funny the way in which so many translations translate the words to say, "do justly." But it is apt. We must live out justice!

We must "do justly"! In other words, we must view justice as a verb!

A while ago I had a vision of a sandcastle on a beach. It came out of the memory that I had from taking my children to the beach on family vacations. Imagine that you and your kids made the biggest and best sandcastle. It was something that everyone admired! You went home with a big smile on your face.

But the very next day, after arriving at the same spot on the same beach, you discovered the inevitable. The sandcastle was gone. But that didn't stop your children from wanting to build the same castle all over again! And being a loving parent, that's exactly what you did.

This vision reminded me of the very heart of God. God doesn't act justly one day and then leave it behind. He does it over and over again! And so should we, no matter how inconvenient it seems.

2. JUSTICE COMES FROM GOD'S HEART.

One author wrote that justice is centered in God's heart. I found this statement particularly interesting, because it forced me to consider the contrast between our hearts and His. Sadly, our hearts are usually far removed from the idea of justice.

Of course there are many areas in our world where justice is needed: The trafficking of young women for sex slavery; the use of child labor in parts of the world where they don't have laws against it; the denial of education for girls; and systemic discrimination against certain racial or economic groups. And the list goes on and on. The important thing is that we open our eyes and see injustice for what it is!

The second part demands that we allow God to move

through us. Theologian Amos Yong says all of us will be "judged according to how the needy of the world are treated." He adds that poor people "are not just objects of charity or even symbols of the injustices of the world; rather, they are the channels through which a lost world encounters the divine."

In other words, it is not that those with disabilities need us, but that we need them. It is through the needy, the poor and the destitute in our world that we come to see God work in us and through us in a way like we never expected. We see God's heart in a fresh way when we "do justly."

3. JUSTICE IS INTERCESSION.

The concept of justice to Christians is different to what it is to non-Christians. For the latter it is often about punishment, something along the lines of retribution. We want criminals to get the justice they deserve.

But followers of Christ see something far greater at work in the Bible. God is a God of restoration. He has a way of working through the grace and mercy of the cross! His justice is always restorative.

But what about those who don't know Jesus? Do we simply sit back and watch them suffer the consequences of sin in our world? Or are we called to do something more? This is where I am proud to be a minister within the

IPHC. We know that the Great Commission is more than just preaching the gospel in words. We must do it in deed also!

Here is where I see a connection between the Great Commission and prayer. We are people who seriously pray, "Your kingdom come," and then we act upon it. We understand that intercession is all about "standing in the gap," and justice is the action part of intercession. We are a people who must go into the world, especially to those who are the least in the eyes of the world.

We go to them in the power of the Spirit who has called us, equipped us and empowered us! And as we do this, we believe that God will supernaturally put all the pieces together in such a way that His kingdom does indeed come in our communities.

If you had told me that I would see God move here more than in any other area of ministry, I would have doubted you. But this is the truth. We have seen God's ongoing and surprising favor upon us as we have just walked out what He has placed in front of us. And it is so wonderful to see.

May God continue to give the people, congregations, conferences and ministries of the IPHC ways to show the restorative justice of God in our world. □

"What God has been reminding us as a denomination, all year long, is that despite the inconvenience, justice is something that we must act on."



An Open Letter to **YOUNG LEADERS** in the IPHC

I recently shared these prophetic directives to a small group of leaders during a retreat.



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.

Back in August I hosted sixteen young men in my home in Georgia for a spiritual retreat. They came from nine states and one foreign country for three days of fellowship, teaching, prayer, hiking, and my town's best barbecue. It was not a one-way conversation. While I had some important advice to share, I listened more than I talked.

This has been the story of my life for the past few years. Ever since I turned 50, I have been intentional about investing in the next generation. My own children are now adults, but it seems I now have a whole new crop of spiritual sons. It has been the most fulfilling thing I've ever done in ministry.

Since my father passed away in 2018, I've been very aware of the brevity of life. I know my days are numbered. That's why I spend so much of my time mentoring the next generation, both men and women. I know I won't be around too much longer. So my job is to do whatever I can to help young leaders prepare for their own unique challenges.

When my young friends come to my house, we spent all our study time in Paul's second epistle to Timothy. Some scholars call this letter "Paul's last will and testament" because Paul knew he would be stepping into eternity soon. He also knew Timothy would soon be hurled into the deep waters of spiritual responsibility even though he didn't feel ready for the challenge.

Paul was passing the baton to his beloved spiritual son. The apostle had done everything he could to prepare his protégé, and now it was Timothy's time to shine. Paul gave Timothy five directives. I'm passing along these instructions to today's emerging leaders—because if you don't heed Paul's advice you will drop the ball.

If you are young and you are called to be a leader, take time to read 2 Timothy and ask the Lord to prepare you for this adventure.

BE BOLD.

Paul advised Timothy: "God has not given us a spirit of timidity" (1:7a, NASB). Leaders can't be fearful. That doesn't mean you won't have weak knees or anxious

thoughts when you step out of your comfort zone. It doesn't mean you won't feel butterflies before you speak publicly. But you must swallow hard and go forward anyway.

Someone must go first. If you have surrendered to the call to leadership, you must bravely push your fears aside. God can change a wimp into a warrior—just as he did in the lives of Moses and Gideon.

One way I have developed boldness in my life is by reading the biographies of true heroes. Over the years I have read and reread the stories of men and women such as Hudson Taylor, Brother Andrew, William and Catherine Booth, Corrie Ten Boom and David Wilkerson (and I regularly re-watch the movie *The Cross and the Switchblade*—the dramatized version of Wilkerson's brave effort to reach gangs in New York City).

BE STRONG.

Paul told his spiritual son: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1b). Paul wrote those words from a filthy Roman prison. He probably had iron cuffs on his wrists, and maybe lice crawling on his body. Paul was toughened by hardship and suffering. Every leader must be tested by adversity. If you can't take the stress and the anguish that spiritual leadership requires, don't try it.

Today's younger generation has been babied. Because of fatherlessness, helicopter parenting, the opioid crisis, video games and a myriad of toxic cultural pressures, many young adults are insecure, depressed, full of anxiety, confused about gender and sexuality, and afraid of responsibility. "Strong" almost sounds like a bad word today. But somebody must rise up and be strong to make a change. You have been chosen!

It is so important that we learn how to go through the difficulties of life. Peter told his followers: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal

among you, which comes upon you for your testing" (1 Peter 4:12). The Greek word for "ordeal" is "pyrosis," which refers to a fire hot enough to melt metal! We can't be spineless weaklings when we face hard times; we must get tough!

STAY TRUE TO GOD'S WORD.

Paul instructed Timothy: "Preach the word ... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (4:2-3a). Many leaders in the previous generation failed to preserve biblical morality. Many churches today are crumbling because we modified our theology to match popular culture instead of just preaching God's timeless truths. (Please forgive my generation for thinking that we could vote to change God's Word.)

I like to watch old Billy Graham sermons from his evangelistic campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s. (Many of them are on YouTube.) Listening to this master preacher articulate the simple gospel helps me keep my own message theologically solid.

How will churches grapple with issues such as sexual behavior, social justice, respect for life and the transgender movement over the next 30 years? Those topics are now in the hands of younger leaders. The ball is in your court. We need preachers of righteousness to resist today's onslaught of deception and apostasy.

MAKE DISCIPLES.

Paul told Timothy: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2:2). Notice Paul did not push Timothy to build big buildings or reach huge crowds. Paul stressed quality over quantity. He knew the best way to build a faithful church is to start with a few authentic disciples and then multiply them.

I tell the men and women I am mentoring: Please don't get addicted to the applause of a crowd. Big audiences will make you feel good about yourself, but they can also walk away from you without warning.

God wants faithful followers who have the ability to reproduce more followers. Never measure your success by the number of people in seats. I believe God is looking for disciples—and you cannot mass-produce disciples in a factory. They are handcrafted, one at a time!

STAY ON FIRE.

Paul also told his spiritual son: "Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you by the laying on of my hands" (1:6b). What's the secret to spiritual passion? I have never met a devoted Christian who didn't spend lots of time alone with God. It was Moses' secret. It was David's secret. You must find the cleft of the rock. You must pray, read the Scriptures and pursue intimacy with the Holy Spirit if you want your spiritual fire to stay ablaze.

Paul was saying, "Stay lit!" You cannot lead God's people if your embers are cold. This is the problem with so much of today's church—we have "professional" leaders who aren't filled with the Holy Spirit. They rely on intellect, gimmicks, church growth strategies and human ability rather than trusting God's power. That might last a few years, but nothing will last if the branches are not continually connected to the vine.

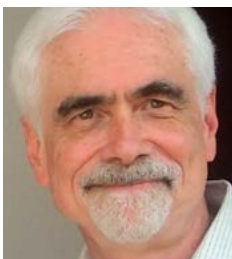
As a father in the Lord, I am urging you: Be bold, be strong, stay true to God's Word, make disciples and stay on fire. Soon you will be handing the baton to another generation. Please be faithful with what Jesus has charged you to do. □



In This Era of Division, We Must Be **UNIFIED**



We've never been more politically and spiritually divided. We need the message of Psalm 133 now more than ever.



BY RUSSELL
BOARD

RUSSELL BOARD has served with IPHC World Missions Ministries for 35 years. He currently lives in Japan and serves as regional director for Continental Asia, overseeing the IPHC's work in a dozen countries. He has authored *Grow*, a manual for new believers, and *Forty Days with Jesus*, a devotional from the gospels. This article is adapted from his book *Forty Days in the Psalms*. You can order it from LifeSprings Resources.

As parents, we feel joy and gratification when we see our children getting along with each other. It puts a smile on a parent's face to hear an older child reading to younger siblings, or to see brothers and sisters happily playing a game together.

However, even the most well-behaved children sometimes argue and fight among themselves. To hear their children lashing out and calling each other names will put an exasperated frown on a parent's face in a hurry.

Surely our Father in heaven views His children in much the same way. Jesus prayed that His disciples would manifest a unity that reflects that of the Trinity itself (see John 17:21-23), and there is no doubt that He was praying according to the will of the Father.

Psalm 133 says: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever."

When Christians worship together, fellowship together, pray together and work together, it is both *good and pleasant*. It greatly enhances the effectiveness of our witness to the world when our unity in Christ is seen to overcome the racial, social, generational and political differences that tend to pull us apart. Christian unity is pleasing to God, and pleasant for us.

On the other hand, Christians who squabble among themselves do not present a appealing witness to the world, and are more likely to repulse than attract unbelievers. Disunity is not pleasing to God, and is not pleasant for us.

This is all straightforward and easy to understand, if not so easy to put into practice. But Psalm 133:2 introduces a new idea that is not intuitively obvious

at all. Here David links the unity of God's people to the anointing of Aaron, the first priest appointed by God under the Levitical system. What is David telling us? He is saying simply that there is a strong and direct link between *unity* and *anointing*.

David's description of Aaron's anointing is graphic and detailed. The oil is said to flow from the head to the beard to the collar of the robe. We're not talking about a skimpy sprinkling of oil here, but an abundant outpouring. Is David wanting us to see that the greater the unity among God's people, the greater the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon them?

We know that oil in Scripture is often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Certainly that is true in the case of Aaron. His anointing was intended to be more than a drenching in olive oil; what Aaron needed and received was a drenching in the Spirit of God.

Consider the uses of oil in the times of Aaron and David. Olive oil was burned in lamps to provide light in houses and to dispel darkness for those walking along paths in the night. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit provides illumination for us as we journey through this world. But it is also true that the light of God's truth, God's direction, and God's presence shines brighter when we are in fellowship with other believers. Christian unity helps to shed light on our path.

Olive oil was also used to refresh those weary from travel. The Holy Spirit certainly revives and renews our souls. But He often uses fellowship with other brothers and sisters to recharge and revitalize us when we are fatigued from struggling to make headway against the current of the world. Christian unity helps to energize and invigorate our walk with the Lord.

Olive oil was also used for medicinal purposes, as a healing agent for wounds. Again, the Holy Spirit ministers healing to both soul and body. But He often brings healing to wounded hearts through the love and encouragement of our brothers and sisters. Christian fellowship creates a community of healing.

We can certainly make a case that Christian unity provides an environment in which the Holy Spirit works in deep and significant ways. "More unity equals more anointing" may well be an axiom of God's kingdom.

Next David changes direction on us again, comparing unity to the dew on Mount Hermon. At nearly 3000 meters, this was the highest peak in Palestine, and was capped with snow nine months of the year. The melted snow flowed into the Jordan River, the source of water and therefore of life for the land of Israel. Even so, a unified church is meant to release the life-giving river of God into the world.

One more thing about Mount Hermon: some say that this was the site of Jesus' transfiguration.

"Christians who squabble among themselves do not present a appealing witness to the world, and are more likely to repulse than attract unbelievers."

(See the account in Matthew 17:1-8.) Interestingly, Moses and Elijah appeared there with Jesus. Both of these men had encountered God upon a mountain, and here they did so again, in the person of Jesus, God incarnate. Here was displayed the unity of God's revelation, as the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) are brought together and fulfilled in Christ.

Peter being Peter, he could not keep himself from blurting out whatever came into his mind when he beheld Jesus transfigured. But God the Father Himself spoke out audibly in response, telling Peter to be quiet and listen to Jesus. This was not the time or place for Peter to put forward his own agenda. This was the time and place for the glory of Jesus to be displayed. Peter needed to focus his full attention on Christ.

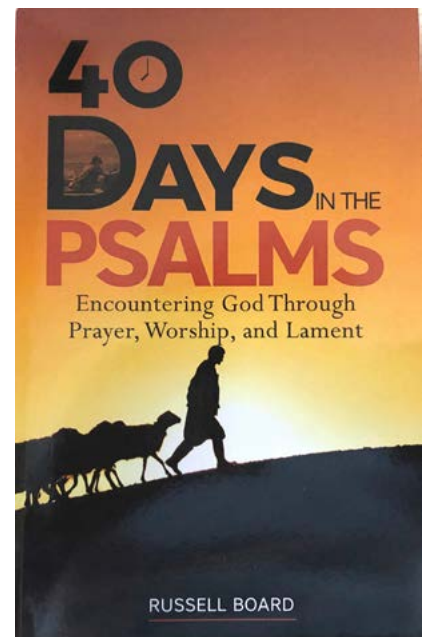
So what can we learn about Christian unity from the images offered by David in this brief psalm?

- **Unity** is good and pleasant; disunity is neither.
- **Unity** helps to promote the gospel.
- **Unity** brings refreshment and healing.
- **Unity** brings the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
- **Unity** brings a revelation of the glory of God.
- **Unity** requires setting aside our own agenda.
- **Unity** comes from focusing on Jesus.

David sums it up this way: "There [in the place of unity] the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

The blessing the Lord bestows, and the abundant life Jesus came to give, are not to be found in pursuit of our individual goals and agendas, but in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is my prayer for all of us: *Lord, I know you are pleased and your Kingdom is strengthened when your people are unified. Help me to put aside personal preferences and ambitions, and seek unity with fellow believers who think and worship and vote differently than I do!* ☐



Russell Board's new book *Forty Days in the Psalms* is available for purchase online. Just go to www.lifesprings.net.