

One year ago we published a special issue of this paper that was dedicated to my recently deceased wife and to all wives of gospel preachers. Words of appreciation came from far and wide, and some preacher's wives whom I had never known wrote indicating they would keep the paper to cheer them in time of discouragement. In view of the good which I believe that paper did, and since many others have already expressed themselves regarding the work, the life and the attitude of preachers, it seems good to me also to express myself. So this issue is also a special one, devoted to the gospel preacher. All articles are written by me - Leslie Diestelkamp.

*“think*

*on these things”*

Philippians 4:8

Volume 6

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Number 1

# THE GOSPEL PREACHER

## *retrospect*

As I type these manuscripts in August, 1974 that will become the material for this special issue of "Think," I sit in a very modest room in a second or third class hotel in one of America's large cities. I look across the room and gaze at the picture of my deceased wife who departed this life about 11 months ago. I think of the strange and perhaps providential circumstances that took a young Missouri farmer and his wife and projected them in work for souls in several of the big cities of the whole world for more than three decades.

There have been trials and heartaches aplenty as we saw satan win the hearts of some who had been faithful to the Lord and as we saw division and strife turn a united brotherhood into a hotbed of factionalism, hatred and alienation. There have been personal failures of our own that grieved us much - inability to help people sufficiently in their spiritual battles against sin, unsuccessful attempts to reach more and more souls with the very precious gospel; incapability to reach all the places and people who appealed to us for help in sowing the good seed of the gospel. (This last point is illustrated by a Nigerian incident. I was discussing work and plans with a native Nigerian preacher, as we tried to plant the church in the big cities of western Nigeria. He bluntly said, "You have a fault! You are indivisible!" His point weighed heavily upon my mind as I considered the great need to do so much more than any one man could do in that fruitful field).

But the joys of success and the happiness of a clear conscience have far outweighed the griefs of our work. We have always tried to remember that the Lord did not command us to convert the world, but he only required that we do our best to preach the gospel to the

whole world. That challenge has taken us into 22 countries and into more than half the states here, and it has brought us into an association with such a multitude of wonderful people, beloved brethren, devoted saints, sincere seekers for truth!

## *a sacrificial life*

There may be some readers of this paper who still believe the preacher's life is a "bed of roses." Forget it! Of course it is usually not a life of hard, manual labor but the mental toil, the emotional stress and the awesomeness of the responsibility drains a man's strength and makes him as tired at the end of the day as is the one who has toiled with his hands. It is probable that one 45 minute sermon, preached with zeal and sincerity may take as much physical energy as an 8-hour day of manual labor. But the delivery of sermons is only a small part of a preacher's total work. He must prepare more lessons, teach privately, read, meditate and pray. He will hardly step from the pulpit today until he is planning a lesson for tomorrow. And all of this must be done with such great care, such deliberate concern for truth and such significant anxiety for the souls of those who will hear. You see, if an auto mechanic makes a mistake, it may cost you more money. If a lawyer makes a mistake, you may have to pay a fine. If your doctor makes a mistake, you may become worse or may even die. But if a preacher makes a mistake, he and many others may spend eternity in hell!

Most preachers willingly accept the life of sacrifice. I know some who receive a minimal wage and yet share it with another preacher who has less. Most preachers forego worldly securities - bank accounts, real estate, etc. (My wife and I were nearly 50 years old before we ever had \$500.00 in savings).

There may be some young men who are planning to become preachers because they like the popularity, the praise of men. But have you counted the cost? Have you thought of the criticisms you will receive - and that you must receive graciously? Have you considered the opposition - by the world, by the unbelievers, by teachers of error both in the church and outside of it? Have you anticipated the privations for your family - the necessity to move quite frequently, the minimal wages, etc.? I urge such young men: don't become a preacher unless you are driven to do so by a real sense of responsibility and by a singular, responsible love for the Lord, for the truth, for the church and for the lost.

But some men do not accept such sacrificial principles. They become dissatisfied and disgruntled. Thus they become pessimistic, mad-at-the-world preachers. They are demanding, caustic, angry men who either then quit most of their preaching in favor of secular work or else they begin to seek for high-paying pulpits. And then the cause of Christ suffers: great Bible scholars waste their time on secular things, eloquent preachers devote themselves to business successes, experienced gospel workers are virtually lost to the cause of evangelism.

Let it be understood that this is not a criticism of the man who supports himself and still preaches the gospel. I applaud him. More such men are needed, and in some places and under some circumstances their work is just as effective as is that of a "full-time" preacher. However, let it also not be supposed that those who quit "full-time" preaching and take up secular work then do the same effective work they did before. (If you show me one such man who does indeed do gospel work with the same effectiveness, I will show you a dozen such men who don't do one-fourth as much as they formerly did).

## *a work of joy*

Almost every gospel preacher with much experience has had joys such as these: (1) There was that Wisconsin bartender who so completely reformed his life that his foreman in a factory recommended the church to his mother simply on the basis of the influence of that former bartender. And, before he died, the man had preached the gospel faithfully for more than 20 years. (2) And there was that Minnesota farmer who would drive 60 miles to hear me preach and then take me aside and argue about the Bible, especially trying to get me to admit that his neighbor's child was surely an example of inherited sin! But now this farmer has been preaching the pure word faithfully and successfully for about 20 years. (3) One Mississippi Christian, with his family, came to Chicago-land for work. He was zealous, sincere and very intelligent, but his background regarding activities of the church was very liberal. He learned the truth and soon returned to his native state and has been a tower of strength and a fruitful worker ever since.

But these are only three examples. There are literally dozens of comparable cases that have touched my own life and that have been the sources of immense joy to me and to others. There have been a few times when I longed for a little rest, some small relaxation from the daily pressures, but there has never been a time when I wanted to turn back! Please excuse me while I use a very personal means of emphasizing the joys of gospel work. I shall share with you a part of the last letter my wife ever wrote to me. It was just five weeks before we discovered she had cancer. I was in some meetings and she was helping care for an invalid uncle in the same home where she lived in our courtship days more than 40 years before. She wrote:

"Wednesday I walked down memory's lane of yesteryears. . . . Literally I walked down the lane to Uncle Tom's mailbox. How those memories rushed back. The girl of yesteryear ran to that mailbox . . . Now the "girl" walked down that lane with the same anticipation of the letter she thought would reward her efforts . . . Then I reflected: what happened to **this girl of yesteryears?** Ah yes, I remember -- she left that lane of memories with a **handsome, strong, young man** and entered another pathway of life. And it broadened into other lanes and highways, seas and skies. And everywhere we left a memory. Perhaps the world would not understand our joys of spreading the word of God but memories have a way of recompensing, knowing some received the truth who otherwise would not have heard.

"Then what more could one need than God's heritage of children and grandchildren?"

"Some say, 'I wish I were 15 again' -- not me. I would not want to try again. I am satisfied with the full life we have shared together and hope we have a few more happy years together. So now good-night and happy dreams while we walk the rest of the pathway.

Love, always, your 60 year old girl,  
Alice D."

Eleven months later, after much suffering for her and much anguish for those of us who watched her body waste away, she had departed from the pathways of this earth. But that only makes her written words above more meaningful and her expressions of joy in spiritual service more significant. In her 41 years of marriage she had lived in 22 houses and had travelled far, far away. But those who knew her would not dare, today, to say they think she would have wanted to do any less! And, significantly, the joys she expressed were those that have lifted the heart and life of this preacher with whom she had such a meaningful partnership in service to God and to mankind.

As I view preachers and their families in general, I think there is too much frustration and too little genuine happiness. I hope this issue of this little paper may help in some small way to alter the course of things, to change the perspective, to brighten the outlook and to really help at least a few to find a deeper and more significant satisfaction in the labor of love that is the work of every faithful preacher of the word.

## *preacher's task*

It seems that many brethren may indeed have a distorted view of the real purpose in life for a preacher, of the singular purpose for having a preacher at all, of the significant commitment he has made when he resolved to preach. He is not a hired nurse maid, a full-time custodian of the building, a general administrator of the congregation or a public relations specialist in the community.

Paul the apostle was an ideal pattern for preachers and it was he who wrote most of what we know about our duties. He said, "Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). But in Ac. 26:15-18 Paul tells us of the call he received and in few words he describes the real mission of preachers. He said that the Lord told him, "I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." That is still our task today.

## *attitude toward the brethren*

"Our brethren are the greatest!" I have said it many times before and I say it again. I mean it, too! There are indeed a few brethren who don't like preachers, who make life tough for us. But generally speaking, brethren everywhere treat preachers very well indeed. They forgive our many faults -- usually they forgive them without even mentioning the faults to us. They love us if we deserve to be loved and many times when we don't deserve it.

It is a pity when a preacher becomes sensitive that he will not accept advice or even criticism by sincere brethren. They are our best friends on earth, and instead of assuming a pontifical air of superiority preachers need to "condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16).

Generally preachers have a happy fellowship with one another and a significant degree of mutual respect. We love each other! But there are some obvious exceptions and there is nothing much more dangerous or more venomous than the tongues of some preachers when they have opportunity to speak a word against another preacher whom they dislike. This other preacher may be one who has fallen into sin, he may have made some bad judgments or he may even be in error in some doctrinal matter, but I have never understood why other preachers seem to hate him so (of course all will deny hate, but "By their fruits ye shall know them"). Preachers ought to be the first people on earth to show consideration for another preacher who has slipped, for which one of us can say he needs no such consideration himself?

## *soul winners*

There is a considerable trend among the young generation to desire to help people. I find them saying, "I want to find ways to help somebody." Of course they think in terms of sitting with some sick person, guiding some drug addict to safety, consoling some unwed mother, sharing food with hungry people, etc. All of those and many more such things are indeed worthwhile works and the world's young people are to be commended for such humanitarian interest. But far more important is ministry to souls! To teach some sinsick soul the way of truth, to lead some rebellious sinner to obedience to God, to share the hope of heaven -- these are indeed the most excellent aspirations for young and old. And though helping those in need physically brings joy to the helper, there is no satisfaction like that of the soul winner!

# The Preacher's Attitude Toward

## his work

There is a wide difference of opinion among preachers as to the scope of our duties and the realm of our responsibilities. For instance, one well-known and able preacher wrote: "If I were a young preacher I would find a good church and settle down there for life." Some years ago, in response to this attitude, I said, "If that represents the scriptural obligation of preachers, then I don't know enough to come in out the rain!" But another preacher wrote not long ago, complaining that some able preachers were content to spend their entire lives in small, weak places. He stressed that they could have been preaching to more people in the large congregations if they would have just tried. Poor man! I wonder if it never occurred to him that some of us have no ambition to preach to the larger congregations because our conscience, motivated by the will of Christ and taught by the words of Paul, sends us into the needy places?

I realize that the following words may not please some of my preaching brethren - and I would like to please them, I assure you. And I must not be misunderstood. I do not believe it is wrong for a man to preach to large, strong churches. I do not believe it is wrong for such strong churches to use a capable preacher. But let's face it, we have this thing backwards. We keep the strongest men in the strongest churches, and we send the beginners out into the new and destitute fields. Now look into your New Testament. Did you ever once read that Paul sent Timothy, Titus or Silas out to start a work in some destitute field while he stayed at the strong, secure places like Philippi or Antioch? Rather, "Paul the aged" went into every hard, troubled place, and he usually left the young man behind only after Paul himself had given it a good start.

But some will say that the weak places depend upon the strong for support, and that the strong preachers must stay with the large churches to keep them strong and active. I wonder. Is it true? Do we admit that we have hired a bunch of pastors? Have we done our work so poorly that the elders cannot use a young man, training and guiding him? If these best, strongest preachers are indeed that - if they are as capable and as dedicated as some suppose - why have they failed to teach the churches in spiritual activity? Items:

1. In the average congregation, even where there are elders, if a problem arises, whom do you call? The preacher. Why?

2. If the work goes well, to whom do you give credit? The preacher. Why? But if the work goes poorly, whom do you blame? The preacher. Why?

3. Some say, "If we don't keep an experienced preacher we will lose our young people." Why? (But I don't believe it, anyway. A good, young preacher, under proper oversight, will probably do just as much good in a large church as will a mature man. It can't be proved otherwise. The system we have now is strictly a thing of our own making.)

4. Others would argue that the experienced preacher should be kept in the large congregations because there he reaches more people. But the young preacher would reach those same people. And anyway, the large crowd to which he preaches consists mostly of people who have heard again and again. Yet that beginner has to go out into the new fields and speak to people who have never heard even once! I ask you again, "Where is the experience needed most?"

But I am not trying to get all the experienced preachers to leave the strong churches. I do wish we could get a few of them to give us even a few years of their lives in the destitute fields of the world.

One of the principle excuses that mature preachers give for wanting to work with larger, stronger churches is that their own children need the association. Be assured I appreciate this point. I am altogether sympathetic. But on the other hand, you must also become aware that such association is no guarantee at all that this will be best for your children. I'll be glad to compare statistics. Consider the children of preachers who have always been in strong churches, and then consider those children of preachers who have remained in the small, weak places. I challenge you to face these kind of statistics. All of us know that those who grew up in the destitute fields do not usually become the weak Christians.

But some will say, "The schools are too bad for my children" (in the needy fields of the world). Well, they were bad a generation ago when my children were students, they were bad two generations ago when I went to school, I suspect they were bad when my grandfather migrated to America as a boy and I don't even suppose the school of Gamaliel was a heavenly arrangement! And Jesus didn't say, "Go preach the gospel where the schools are good" (or where the weather is pleasant, or where the brethren are congenial, or where the elders are strong, etc., etc.). He did say, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel."

Some preachers may still make that old, tired argument, "One doesn't have to go to a distant place to be faithful." My response is, "Somebody does."

## his family

If a preacher's life and work is to be successful and satisfying, he needs to "give himself" to that work wholeheartedly, but to do so he must also "give his family." There is no way he can be happy and fruitful unless his family is equally committed to his work. This commitment has to begin with the wife, but too often it ends with the children! In other words, sometimes the children become unwilling participants in the sacrificial life and unhappy heirs of the uncomplimentary designation "P.K." ("preacher's kid").

Some preachers seem to try to find a solution to this problem by allowing their children to be more like to world around them. But this is not a cure, for then the whole family will fail in influence, they will be unhappy in the awareness of their failure and the appeal of the world will grow stronger, not weaker, as the years go by.

Other preachers constantly berate their children and by so doing only add to the dislike of the youth for their lives in a preacher's household. They may indeed come to look with envy upon their friends who are not thus encumbered. Life in a preacher's home may become a bore, a burden, consisting of "all the things we have to do" and of "all the things we can't do," just because they are preacher's children!

But when I said that if you give yourself you have to give your family also, I did not mean that such was a burden. Rather, just as one who truly gives himself to the Lord -- a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) -- does so with joy, so the preacher who gives his family to God will do so with happiness. In fact, the unhappy preacher is the one who hasn't given his family too! And such action must be taken deliberately, with steadfast diligence. Plans for such action must be begun the day you bring them home from the hospital - right then and there you must begin to make impressions upon those tender minds. And remember, you can only commit the hearts and minds of your children to God insofar as your own heart and mind is thus committed. No, you can't demand that they be Christians and you cannot force them to appreciate the sacrificial life, but you can lead, you can guide, you can train them. As far as character and commitment is concerned, your children will pretty well go where you go, do what you do and be what you are. Be sure you give them something good, something rich in eternal values, something joyful to follow!

# Should The Preacher Move?

It would be amusing if it were not such a serious matter -- I'm thinking of the custom that has preachers moving every two or three years. Now, as you will see in this article and in other articles in this issue of "Think," I do not believe it is wrong to move -- in fact I favor much moving among preachers. But I lament the usual, obvious reasons for some such moves.

I believe most preachers move because of conscience -- they sincerely believe they will be more useful in another place -- that such a move would give greater opportunity for service in the cause of Christ. And I suspect they are usually correct.

But there are obviously some who have nothing more than one of the following reasons for moving: (1) Some seek advancement -- the honor and the greater salary that usually comes from a larger church. (2) Others have run out of sermon outlines (which they probably copied from some book they bought) and they haven't the spiritual fortitude to search the scriptures and develop more material. (3) Still others have stirred up such a hotbed of strife that they have to leave. (4) And some even live so carelessly that the brethren ask them to move.

## Why Stay?

But there is another extreme. Perhaps we also need to ask why some are unwilling to move, even though circumstances almost demand it and fruitfulness suggests it. Even though they have obviously done their best work there, even though the church really needs a change, and even though another place challenges the preacher to much greater opportunity, some will not move. (1) Some have bought a house and just can't bring themselves to leave it. (2) Others have children in school and don't

want to disrupt their education. I am sympathetic in this, but do not believe it is usually a valid reason. Only one of my own children graduated from the same high school to which he started, yet all graduated with success, two in the National Honor Society and none maladjusted. (3) Some preachers won't move because they can't get a bigger place and they won't accept a smaller one (in my own case I never moved to a church that was as large as the one I was leaving, and this was altogether deliberate on my part, and I believe it needs to be seriously considered by most preachers as a proper fulfillment of their responsibilities).

The fact is, some preachers won't move unless they have to, and then they won't do it gracefully, but rather resentfully. Some seem to have no real concept of doing "the work of an evangelist", especially beyond the very community in which they now live.

If you, my reader, think I am wrong about the above remarks, then just find a man who is preaching to 200 people and tell him of a great need to go and preach to a small church or start a work in a new field. Then write and tell me what his answer is!

Yes, I believe some preachers ought to move. They should sometimes get up out of the places of security, out of the comforts of affluence, out of the congregations of strength, and they need to go out into the fields of spiritual poverty, into the congregations of numerical and financial weakness and even into the places where the church is divided and torn by strife. A preacher abandons his real calling, fails in his God-given responsibility and neglects the singular mission in life that he assumed when he offered himself as a preacher of

the Word, if he steadfastly declines to hear the call of the hard, neglected, needy fields of the world, near and far.

So many preachers have ulcers. They may blame it on the stress of the local work in which they are engaged. I can sympathize. But why not get away from that? Why not give your ulcers a rest by satisfying the gnawing ache that must be in your heart to get out into the fields and do the work that will enable you to lie down with your conscience and sleep peacefully? Think about it!

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## NOTICE

At the time of printing, the preaching trip of Karl Diestelkamp and Robert Speer to the African nation of Nigeria is coming to a close, and by the time you receive this issue they should be home. A detailed report will be printed in the next issue.

# "think

on these things" Philippians 4:8

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LESLIE DIESTELKAMP, editor  
Ferry Creek, Victoria 3786, Australia

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**KARL DIESTELKAMP**  
8311 27th Avenue  
Kenosha, Wis 53140  
(414) 694 3552

**AL DIESTELKAMP**  
5916 Graceland Dr.  
Peoria, Ill. 61614  
(309) 691-6864

2730 Gaynor Avenue  
Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. 54494

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