

**DIALOGUES**

**WITH**

**EARL PALMER**

Stephen R. Yarnall, M.D.

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# THIS BOOK ...

More than a biography, "Dialogues with Earl Palmer" is based on one-to-one interviews with Questions of special interest relating to Earl's ideas and experiences. Over sixty hours were spent in dialogue getting to learn about Earl Palmer's life experiences and thought processes that make him an outstanding mentor for so many persons

Earl's spoken messages are incredibly inspiring, yet a different style from the restrictive constraints of his books. When speaking he frequently interrupts himself as, for example, he stops to analyze a Greek word that is key to the concept under discussion. He does the same insertion in his books, though written with an eagle's eye for precision. Topics discussed in our personal interviews overlapped those discussed in his books; therefore, some redundancy is to be expected. We have adopted the convention of putting my questions and comments in bold type and Earl's in conventional font.

A major goal of this book is to stimulate questions and discussion among persons of all faiths. Each chapter begins with an outline so that topics may be taken in any sequence of interest to the reader. A discussion outline is provided at the end of each chapter.

## ***THIS BOOK ...***

*Is for friends to know Earl Palmer and me,  
For Atheists who believe in no God but "me,"  
For Agnostics who wonder what "truth" can be,  
And for Believers of basic Christianity.*

*THIS BOOK presents the views of two,  
In a dialogue way to speak with you,  
With questions, not answers, for what is true:  
"One wonders" and "It depends" are answers  
that come through.*

*The basic choice is up to you!*

*Stephen R. Yarnall*

# DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to my nephew, Cpl. Steven A. Rintamaki, who died September 16, 2004 at age 21 as a U.S. Marine in Iraq. As a child, Steven was active in the children's program at the University Presbyterian Church (UPC) in Seattle, Washington. He is remembered for his high energy, smile and skill with his violin.*

Steven's mother, Myra, my sister-in-law, and a member of UPC, was supported in her grief by the church's pastoral staff and members, giving witness to its motto, "Every Member a Minister."

*Senior Pastor at UPC, Earl Palmer, remembers Steven and is pleased that this book is dedicated to his memory. Earl also remembers another U.S. Marine, his own father.*

*Steven's last letter home contained a poem about his relationship with God:*

When I was alone and had nothing  
I asked for a friend to help me bare the pain:  
No one came except GOD

When I needed a breath to rise from my sleep  
No one could help me except GOD

When all I saw was sadness and I needed answers  
No one heard me except GOD

So when I'm asked who  
I give my unconditional love to –  
I look for no other name except GOD!

... and for you, the reader of this poem and book, I pray that you come closer to God as you learn from the life of Earl Palmer with his wit and wisdom based on many years of Bible study and everyday living, with 50 years of service as a Presbyterian minister.

\*\*\*

*A Steven A. Rintamaki perpetual scholarship has been established for children of MARINES to go to the school of their choice. To make a donation contact the marine Corps Scholarship Foundation, Cpl. Steven A. Rintamaki Memorial Scholarship, P.O. Box 3008, Princeton, N.J. 98543 or website for credit card: [www.marine-scholars.org](http://www.marine-scholars.org)*

**In Loving Memory of**



**CPL. Steven A. Rintamaki**  
**USMC**  
**June 17, 1983**  
**September 16, 2004**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The word “acknowledgment” comes from the root words of “accord”(agreement) and “knowledge” and has several meanings, each of which relates to my work on this book, “Dialogues with Earl Palmer.”

1. “To recognize rights, authority or status:” I recognize the authority of Jesus Christ in my life; He is the “Ultimate Encourager” for this book.
2. “To disclose knowledge or agreement:” I accept Jesus as the Son of God, and accept others who have made different spiritual choices.
3. “To express gratitude or obligation:” I am grateful to God for the gift of life and for the many gifts I have been given in my life. One of these gifts is the privilege of getting to know Earl Palmer and writing this book based on dialogues with him and on his writings and spoken words.

As I meditated on what to write as acknowledgments, I realized I could write a book on acknowledgments alone! And if I did write such a book my main fear would be forgetting someone, or something, or some place of central importance. And I would still worry, as I do now, about apparent priorities in lists where so many persons, places or things are important.

I acknowledge Earl as my mentor who has brought me back to Jesus and to the Bible as a book to be studied and thoughtfully interpreted. His analysis of key words in the context of each written document in the Old Testament and New Testament lays the foundation for understanding the true meaning of the written words.

Earl was a great encourager for this book, sharing my objective of recording his response to probing questions that might be asked by disbelievers, agnostics or the many believers with unanswered questions. Some would like to know more about Earl and his ideas. My goal has been to provide these answers in an interesting and relaxed format. Earl is not only informative, but is motivating, and ... yes, humorous.

I believe one of the reasons Earl agreed to work with me on this book was his assessment of my earlier book, *“Dialogues With Dale – the Wit & Wisdom of Dale Turner.”* Earl and I both had a great respect and love for Dale Turner, and we acknowledge his concept that there may be *‘Unity of spirit with diversity of opinion.’*

I acknowledge the great help and encouragement of Nancy Schuldt, Earl’s “Senior Pastor Secretary.” Nancy arranged about thirty 90-minute meetings for the dialogues with Earl over a year on a near-weekly basis. She also gathered up old photographs of Earl to be included in the text. In addition, she arranged two photo shoots with Wayne Kenney, whom we also acknowledge for the cover shot and other photographs. Above all, Nancy was gracious and encouraging for this project.

Special thanks are given to UPC Librarian Sue Dryer and her staff. The UPC library is a comfortable, well-lit area with a wide scope of material for all ages. Audiotapes of weekly sermons are available, as is a collection of Earl Palmer books.

As noted in the Dedication I acknowledge that a series of events, which may be viewed as “God’s will,” led to this project. My nephew, Steven Rintamaki, adopted son of my wife’s sister, Myra Rintamaki, joined the U.S. Marines to serve our country and to pursue meaning in his own life. (See his poem in the Dedication.) Myra, as a long-time member of University Presbyterian Church (UPC), turned to the church for emotional and spiritual support following Steven’s death in Iraq. After Steven’s funeral my wife, Lynn, and I were moved to find out more about UPC.

I acknowledge the pastoral staff of UPC for the encouragement they gave me and for the sermons and leadership they provided with their own styles, while clearly evidencing “the Palmer approach.”

My wife, Lynn, gets special thanks for our shared Christian journey at UPC and for the home, relatives, friends, pets and events we share together. Although, due to my physical problems, I can no longer run with her, I am impressed with her accomplishments in 100-mile mountain trail races and other ultra-marathon events. The time she spent training and doing these runs left me uninterrupted time for study and writing. I believe each partner in a marriage needs quality time alone as well as with their partner

and I acknowledge Lynn for sharing this value and encouraging my bookwork and medical practice.

Next, I acknowledge the dedicated and enthusiastic help from my Editorial Assistant, June Cornett. June attended and tape-recorded the dialogue sessions of Earl and myself, which she then transcribed, making editorial changes appropriate for changing conversations into written communication. She worked with me to edit the final drafts of each chapter and provided help with word-choice, sentence structure and checking references. The final editing, after manuscript review by Earl, was done with June. Her cheery attitude and deep Christian faith led us through some times of stress.

I particularly appreciate Tera and Snohomish Publishing Company in Snohomish, Washington. Their rapid response to a “hang up” in original plans for printing allowed this work to be available sooner than it would have after we encountered some problems with initial plans.

Many other individuals deserve acknowledgement and appreciation. Jeanie Arnold helped with manuscript revisions, and transfer to CD to go to the publisher. Jeanie also helped clean up and clean out hundreds of e-mails. The final touches on the manuscript and the computer work were done with Annie Cater, to whom I am extremely grateful.

Most of all, I acknowledge Earl Palmer, the great encourager, for sharing himself to bring the message of Jesus to all who read this and listen to the words. As said by Yogi Berra—

*“Its amazing what you can see when you listen!”*

**Stephen Yarnall  
Edmonds, Washington**

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# PREFACE

*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

*1 Corinthians 2:13*

**Earl Palmer is a Presbyterian minister who is a masterful teacher with words “taught by the Spirit,” which he continues to bring to individuals around the world.**

**One person can make a large difference in the lives of others.**

**Earl Palmer is such a “difference-maker.”**

**Christianity has been interpreted and taught by countless individuals through a multitude of churches, so different from one another as to be in conceptual conflict on the basic meaning of “Christianity.” But, beyond the squabbles among various denominations, there are certain outstanding individuals who transcend denominational differences in their expression of the Christian message. These mentors provide encouragement and show us a way to Christian living. Earl Palmer is a special Christian role model who has become a mentor and “difference-maker” for many of us.**

**Earl’s Biblical and academically-based approach to relating the Christian story is personal and imaginative as he uses a story-telling technique that speaks to each of us.**

**As a child Earl attended the Community Presbyterian Church in McCloud, California. Halfway through college he became deeply involved in Bible studies that led to his commitment to Christ. Today Earl Palmer is the Senior Pastor of “UPC,” the University Presbyterian Church, a large and vital church in Seattle, Washington. Earl’s teaching is based on biblical and contemporary stories, which he relates in an animated, witty way. At UPC, rather than feeling judged, we feel called upon to make our own judgments.**

***Dialogues With Earl Palmer* relates the background and ideas of this remarkable man. Those who know him and those**

**who are meeting him for the first time will be inspired by Earl's approach to life and life's big questions.**

**In addition to direct dialogues between the two of us, written material from his books is used to answer questions posed to him. For the sake of accuracy, Earl has reviewed all the text.**

**I asked Earl, “*What question you would least like to have me ask?*” He replied, “*I've been in a lot of Q&A's with many different people and I don't know any question that I worry about.*” In our dialogues Earl was true to his word and answered every question that I posed to him.**

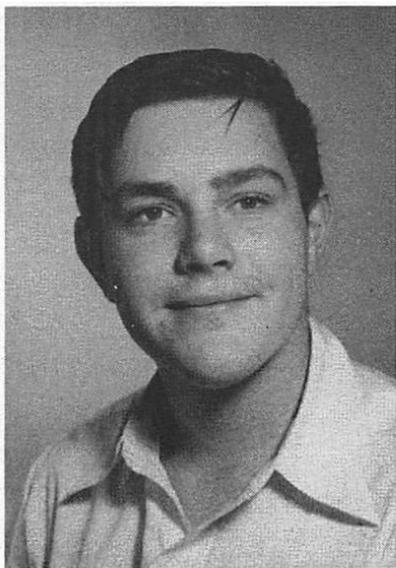
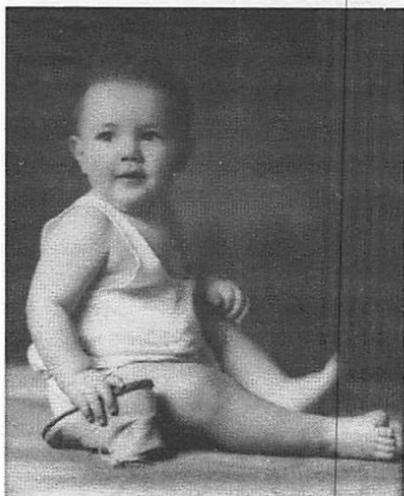
**Whether or not you've met Earl Palmer before, and whatever your spiritual beliefs may be, it is my belief that his words will have an impact on you and will make a *difference* in your life as he has in mine.**



# SECTION I

# EARL'S LIFE STORY

## Section I – Early Earl



# **Section I – Earl’s Life Story**

## **Introduction**

On June 6, 2005 I arrived one hour early for my first scheduled meeting with Earl Frank Palmer, Senior Pastor of the University Presbyterian Church, located in Seattle at the Northwest corner of the University of Washington campus. I presented myself to his secretary, Nancy Schuldt, who welcomed me and led me through her office into a comfortable waiting room between their two work areas. The waiting room had a small sofa and comfortable chairs making one feel relaxed and welcome.

I had heard Earl’s sermons and was immediately attracted to his good-humored, intellectual and motivating personality and to his approach to the Bible and Jesus Christ.

The purpose of my meeting with Earl was to ask for his agreement to publish a series of dialogues dealing with his background and basic beliefs on a number of questions that were important to me, and which I thought would be of interest to many others.

Earl came out to greet me with a large smile and friendly laughter. He was dressed casually with an open-neck shirt without a tie or sport coat. We went into his office space where there was a large well-organized desk and a discussion area. Behind his desk area were bookshelves holding copies of his favorite books along with copies of his own published books. His office was decorated with memorabilia including organ pipes, a wood-carving, mountaineering photographs and a remarkable four-part drawing by Hugo Shi beautifully representing the many aspects of Earl’s life.

The upper left of Shi’s drawing includes: the lion Aslan, the Christ figure in the Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis; the cross of Christ; the candlestick and the prison number of Jean ValJean from “Les Miserables,” Earl’s favorite theatrical production, illustrating the grace of God.

The upper right includes: a kite, Earl’s teaching metaphor that to be free to soar we must be tethered to Christ; the Bible turned to

Romans, one of Earl's favorite books; and the map representing where Paul traveled to preach the gospel.

The lower left shows: the family on Whidbey Island, representing the closeness of several generations, the joy of beach walks, building sand castles and his wife Shirley holding the newest grandchild.

The lower right of Shi's remarkable drawing shows Mt. Shasta, which Earl has climbed more than fifty times; and a skier illustrating one of Earl's metaphors, "Always put your weight on the downhill ski," even if it goes against our initial inclination.

This "Renaissance man" agreed to the series of meetings and this book is the result of those dialogues.

# EARLY EARL

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*Community Presbyterian Church of*



*Centennial Celebration  
May 6-8, 2005*

*McCloud, California*

*As our dialogue brings out, Earl has small-town beginnings prior to big-town leadership roles. We pickup our dialogue as follows:*

## **Family Background**

**Tell me your recollections of your Dad and Mom and growing up in McCloud.**

Lewis Ward Palmer, a young man from New York, came to McCloud, California in 1924 to work in The McCloud River Lumber Co.

He met a beautiful young school teacher, Myrtle Elizabeth Hovey, who had grown up in Yreka, California, had gone to college at UC Berkeley and San Jose State College and was at that time teaching in the McCloud Elementary School.

They were married in Yreka and soon had settled into the house on 116 California Avenue, McCloud, where our family was to grow up through all of our McCloud years. Lewis Ward Palmer Jr. was the oldest son. Earl Frank was three years younger. Nancy Elizabeth was born five years later and three years after that Marian Lee was born, and the youngest in the family.

The no-nonsense and humorous mother, together with her very hard working husband, totally dependable in every way, were able to raise and educate through college and graduate schools, their four children.

Their love and never compromised integrity, mixed together with an adventurous and inquisitive spirit, provided the building blocks for this family.

I always felt safe in my family and always could count on the encouragement of my parents and my brother and my sisters to support the adventures that my mind and heart would dream up. The very atmosphere of that house had a 'let's go for it' edge about it so that when I look back to those formative years I am grateful for each of those building blocks that framed my character and my goals.

**What about your grandparents? Do you have any pastors in the family?**

No, there are no pastors in our whole family. We know the family history pretty well. My Dad's family goes way back to John Whipple, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. It's amazing that I found no pastors on either side of our family tree.

My mother's family goes back to the pre-Revolutionary War days. Daniel Hovey came over on the Speedwell and my mother is a Hovey, a prestigious family in New England history. A Naval destroyer was named after one of my mother's remote uncles – the USS Richard Hovey. Also, there is a Hovey Park in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

**Our family also has a destroyer named for one of my relatives, the USS Yarnall. Our Yarnall family roots are in Philadelphia and one of my relatives was a Bishop or another high-ranking official in the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. I was baptized in the Episcopal Church as an infant.**

I was baptized in the Episcopal Church, too, in Yreka, California. My mother was an Episcopalian her whole life.

**My maternal grandfather was Charles Burton Robbins who was Assistant Secretary of War (when they had such positions). My mother's maternal side was the Larrabee family, who were prominent in Iowa politics. Governor Larrabee had a mansion named Montauk in Claremont, Iowa. Montauk is now a historical museum open to the public.**

**When were you introduced to church?**

I first attended church in McCloud, California, a little company town with a small church, the McCloud Community Presbyterian Church. I grew up to be a minister so they asked me to come and speak at their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. It was a joyous experience. Also, they dedicated their library to me. That was a surprise. I was overwhelmed.

**That's quite an honor!**

My father lived to be 97 and my mother 92. My grandfather, Frank Hovey, was a Stagecoach driver for Wells Fargo and was an important person in my life, though he died before I was born. My middle name is in his honor. I wrote a poem about him entitled "I Have My Grandfather's Watch."

## **EARL'S POETRY**

### ***I Have My Grandfather's Watch***

*I have the watch he carried  
to keep the time for horses and men.  
I was named for Frank Hovey and he was  
my boyhood hero because of the stories I knew.  
My mother told me of dangerous journeys  
over narrow beaten paths etched into steep canyons.  
This driver of horses and stage coach tamed a frontier in  
the mountains west of my mountain.  
His were the towns of a rugged older time with  
names I loved and always thought smelled of gold and dusty roads.  
Yreka, Fort Jones, Happy Camp Etna, Ashland, Hornbrook.  
They were the place that horses knew as the times  
for water and rest. Here Frank Hovey takes his  
watch in hand and opens its silver lid to find the minutes and hours  
of a time before the time when I was born.  
He was my grandfather. A man of adventure with a gentle wife.  
He had one son and one daughter who is my mother  
and she gave his watch to me.  
I have the watch he carried to keep the time  
for horses and for a new world he gave to me.*

*Earl Frank Palmer ©*

I also wrote poems about my mother and father, which pretty much summarizes what a good family I was privileged to grow up in. My Dad was a New Yorker who came west. You will see in the poem that I wrote about my Dad that he grew up in New York and Albany and Syracuse, and then as a young man he came all the way to Northern California where he met my mother and that's their story. Mother was a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church and I was baptized there. My Dad was a Marine.

### *My Father Guarded the Doorway*

*My father guarded the doorway of  
the church like the Marine he always was.  
He had a broad smile and hands very strong as  
he stood proud to be where and who he was.*

*Those who entered by his way were safe  
and at peace in this house of prayer and song.*

*And when it was time they would  
leave in the way they had come  
by my father who guarded the doorway of  
the church like the marine he always was.*

*Earl Frank Palmer ©*

*My Mother, My Teacher*

*My mother was a school teacher in McCloud and  
that was how she and my father  
found each other. They were both  
young with love in their hearts  
and a vision in their eyes to see.*

*My mother was a teacher to her family  
and I remember the things she  
taught to my sisters, to my brother  
and also to me.*

*We learned to work an honest day from  
this tireless lady of our house.*

*We learned to think not only the  
thoughts of others but our own  
and without apology.*

*We learned to live each morning, noon and  
night without small complaints  
or artful blame.*

*We learned to laugh with the dry and  
broad good humor of the mighty and the small,  
both the same.*

*We learned to try out and try on  
each possibility without the fear  
of later reprimand.*

*We learned to endure hardships,  
from the calm matter of factness  
of her understated courage.*

*We learned to love in the faithful  
way we are loved by this teacher of ours.*

*And best of all we learned our names:  
and who we should be from a teacher  
we call our Mother.*

*Earl Frank Palmer ©*

# **The Young Marine From Syracuse**

*The Eastern names from my father's youth  
always seemed strange sounding and far away to my California ear.*

*Booneville North Tanawanda Parris Island Albany and Syracuse  
These were places of his growing up until he  
went away and found the places our family knew.*

*We laughed about his towns and their funny sounds  
unlike the familiar western names we loved to hear,  
Sisson Yreka Fort Jones Siskiyou  
McCloud Dunsmuir Konwakaton and Wyntoon*

*But our best of every name was Mt. Shasta who  
reigned above the towns and rivers and the  
people too like a Grand Schooner made of  
broken stone and snow and sails of sky.*

*It seemed to my eye that she was the one  
that moved each day through the unruly summer sea  
of windy clouds and evening flame*

*Yet I always found this ship returned  
from its mysterious voyages quiet and  
at home when morning came.*

*I even wonder if her journeys had  
once found a restless young marine who  
was on the loose  
and needed to get away from Syracuse.*

**Earl Frank Palmer ©**

## **Sports, Activities & Injuries**

### **Did you play sports in high school?**

Yes, football, but as a youth, more than anything else, I enjoyed mountaineering and skiing. Also I was very involved in swimming and ended up teaching swimming.

### **Did you ever have any major injuries or illnesses?**

No, I never did. I was very fortunate because I have climbed a lot, including Mt. Rainier, and never had any injuries. I had back surgery last year that was needed because of a lower back cyst that caused me to lose strength in my legs. My orthopedist, Dr. Kenneth Leong, indicated that he operated primarily because of the loss of strength in my legs and toes. Since I couldn't get up on my toes, I was a candidate for surgery. He operated on September 21, 2004 and said it would take about one year to get full strength back. I am about 80% now and hope all my strength comes back.

**I've had back pain without loss of strength. I had neck and arm pain with some loss of strength and had a cervical disc fusion with a plate in my neck.**

Was that when you fell out of the chair lift?

**No, that was later, on January 28, 2000. That's when I developed ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome), spent 92 days in the hospital and nearly died. I attributed part of my healing to the prayers of so many people. You have a copy of my book, "*Beyond Medicine*," where I discuss the role of prayer in healing.**

Yes, yours is a remarkable story.

**Yes, it is, and I really owe my survival to the love and prayers from my family and hundreds of others who followed my condition with daily emails and recorded phone messages from Lynn and other family members.**

## Meeting Shirley



### **Back to your history — where did you meet your wife?**

I met Shirley, my life partner and best friend, here in Seattle when I was a Youth Minister at University Presbyterian Church, my first pastoral post out of seminary.

With Shirley it was love at first sight. We fell in love and were married June 14, 1958. Shirley graduated from the University of Washington and became a teacher of science at Garfield High School in Seattle.

In 1962 our daughter, Anne, was born. In 1964 we three moved to the Philippines where I became Pastor of the Union Church of Manila. Our son Jonathan was born in Manila on November 22, 1965 and then Elizabeth on February 3, 1970. These children of ours became the greatest joy of our life together. Like you, Anne and her husband Greg, are physicians. Shirley and I have seven grandchildren.

## **Growth of our Family**

The Manila years were deeply formative for my own ministry as I learned to preach to an international congregation and serve as a solo pastor to a congregation of over five hundred. Shirley became deeply involved in Philippine villages teaching nutrition classes, cooking and child care encouragement with young mothers. She also was a counselor at the American School of Manila near our church.

In 1970 our family moved to Berkeley, California as I was called to be pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. These years also profoundly shaped each of our lives. The three youth in our family grew up in the local public schools of Richmond Unified School District that served our neighborhood in El Cerrito, which bordered Berkeley on the north. Each of them completed most of their college and graduate education during our Berkeley days.

Anne attended Stanford University for her Bachelor's degree in Science (Physical Chemistry), then the University of Washington Medical School for Medicine and Children's Hospital/University of Washington for her residency. Jon attended Stanford University for his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, then his law degree from Boldt Hall of Law, University of California at Berkeley. Elizabeth attended the University of Washington for her Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communications and her M.A. degree from Rutgers University, New Jersey, in Theatre Arts.

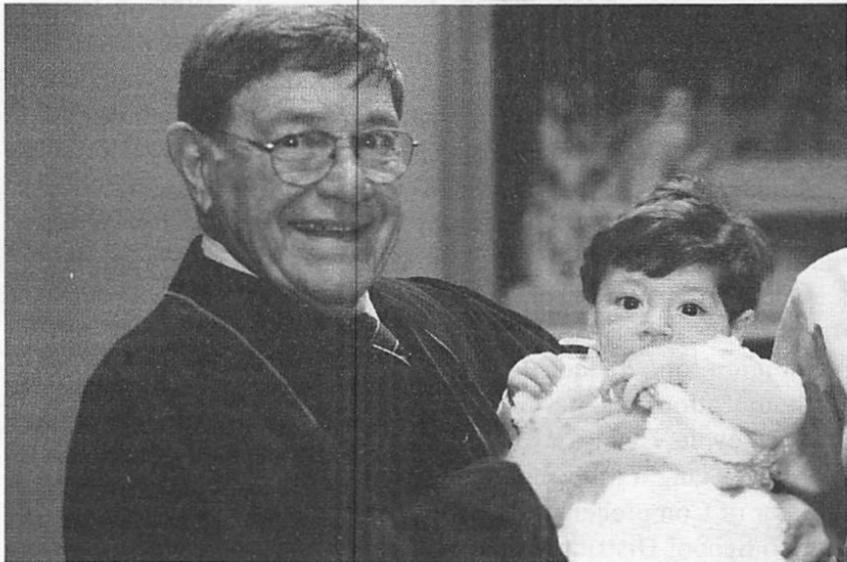
Shirley taught high school science and eventually became the Director of Comprehensive Health Education for the Richmond Unified School District, Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, a district of 32,000 youth. She was responsible for the teaching mandates for health education, AIDS education, drug, alcohol & tobacco prevention education and sex education. Her leadership was brilliant; nevertheless, she agreed to leave that post in 1991 when I received the call to become pastor at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. This ministry has fully challenged us both. Shirley decided to enter the PhD program in Public Policy, School of Education at the University of Washington, receiving her PhD degree in 2002.

Shirley and I are grateful for our family. Anne and her husband, Greg Welsh, are both pediatric physicians and live in Bellingham, Washington with their two girls, Sarah and Emily.

Jonathan and Kara Diane Palmer are both lawyers and they now live in Hong Kong with their two sons, Andrew and Thomas. Jonathan represents his law firm in Asia

Elizabeth and Eric Jacobsen now live in Tacoma, Washington where Eric is Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma. They have three children, Katherine, Peter and Emma. All seven of our wonderful grandchildren now fit within the span of age 5 through age 11.

## Handling Infants During Baptism



**Speaking of children, I am very impressed by the way you handle the infants during baptism ceremonies and the way they are so comfortable with you. They don't even cry.**

Well, they do cry with me sometimes.

**They must, it's the nature of a child to cry. But they are all so comfortable with you. I'm comfortable with you too, but sometimes you make me cry as I am moved by your sermons.**

“I always look right at them when I baptize them and they almost always look right at me.”

**They say that autistic children don’t look at you.**

I’ve learned that early childhood research at the University of Washington shows that children do not interact with faces on television. They actually need live human faces to learn how to respond normally. I look right in each face and smile and they will smile back, or they will study me.

## **Experiences after McCloud**

**Back to you – What was your experience after McCloud?**

One of my high school teachers particularly encouraged me to apply at the University of California in Berkeley. I entered Berkeley in 1949 and graduated in 1953. Berkeley was important for me as the place I learned to think, study and write. And in Berkeley my faith in Jesus Christ became my life experience.

The following poem was written in memory of Robert Boyd Munger during my years at Berkeley

### **When I Was Young**

*When I was young I needed to find the  
way for my feet to run,  
I needed to know who I was and who  
I needed to become.  
I needed to find the goals for the race  
that deserve the running,  
I needed to believe the grace that  
would settle my soul.  
I needed to know the truth that could  
last through the night and shine in the morning.  
I needed to come home to that peaceful  
place where forgiveness and hope keep the fire going.  
What I needed God gave to me while  
I was young when I met a man  
who called his heart Christ’s home.*

*Earl Frank Palmer ©  
In Memory of Robert Boyd Munger*

## Interests at Berkeley

While I was at Berkeley, I lived in the Barrington Hall Co-op and towards the end of my sophomore year I was invited to a Bible study in my dorm. While considering the Bible with the men in that group, I solidified my commitment to Christ. I became very active in this small Bible study group of college men. I was also very active on campus. I taught swimming at Cal and was active in mountaineering. I was a member of the Sierra Club and the University of California swimming Club. Mountaineering interests were sort of my big thing.

**Eric Gebelein, one of my friends who died a number of years ago, wrote Wilderness As Healer. He wrote this twenty-two years before he died, but the messages are still valid. He took kids who were hyperactive and noted that on trips to the wilderness they would calm down. He took kids who were withdrawn and they pepped up. So the wilderness is a great neutralizer. (Gebelein's book is available through Thornton Publishing.)**

## Swimming & Teaching

I just stumbled into teaching swimming. During my late high school and college summers I worked for the McCloud Lumber Company in the woods as a Compass Man in timber cruising. I was taken from work in the woods when the company offered to pay me to do three weeks of swimming lessons for youth in McCloud. To qualify as an instructor I had to have my WSI (Water Safety Instructors Certificate from the Red Cross). I achieved the WSI at Berkeley from the university originally in order to teach swimming in McCloud. When I finished getting the WSI the head of Men's Swimming at UC Berkeley asked me to teach swimming there, too, in the Men's Swimming Department.

During my junior and senior years at Cal I taught swimming in the Physical Education Department. That was a great experience because I learned how to teach people to swim, and I became quite good at it. At one point, Jack Hewitt, who was head of the Swimming Department at Berkeley, took me aside and said, "You know, Palmer, you are a natural born teacher." And it's funny that

this conversation took place the same day that I went to talk to Dr. Munger, the Pastor of the church I attended, and said to him, “I think I’d like to be a minister.” His reply was, “Well, you know that a minister in the Presbyterian Church is mainly a teacher. Do you like to teach?” I said to Dr. Munger, “Isn’t that interesting. That’s what my supervisor in the swimming department said today – that I was a natural teacher.” I felt this was almost like a sign.

## **“A Simple Career”**

After graduating in 1953 from Cal Berkeley with a BA in Political Science, I went on to Princeton Seminary for three years, graduating in 1956 with a BD (Bachelor of Divinity) in Theology. Princeton had a profound influence upon my life in every way. After Princeton I came to this church, UPC, as a Youth Pastor. I’ve had a very simple career.

### **You must have met Dale Turner about that time.**

Yes, we got acquainted and kept in touch. His death was a great loss. Once he saw me in Manila and he saw me in Berkeley. I think he was just the greatest guy.

### **What was next in your career?**

I was Youth Pastor at UPC for eight years when a surprise remark from a friend was to change my life. This friend, who lived in Lebanon, said, “You should be a pastor in one of the Union Churches.” There are more than eighty English speaking Union Churches all over the world for expatriate populations, like the American Church in Paris, the American Church in Beirut, and even an American Church in London. There is one in Jerusalem, the International Church of Bangkok, a Union Church in Tokyo and one in Manila.

To make a long story short, my friend said, “You really ought to become a Union Church Pastor.” This idea sounded exciting, so Shirley and I quietly kept the door open for God’s leading. The fact that my good friend considered me capable of this ministry was an encouragement; this idea might not have occurred to me otherwise. God can guide our lives through close friends who encourage us.

So later, when I was back for a meeting in Princeton, I interviewed with Dr. Raymond Gray, an executive with the National Council of Churches in New York City, who related to these international churches. To my surprise the Union Church in Manila sent someone over to listen to me speak and invited Shirley and me to come to Manila. So I went as Pastor to the Union Church in Manila, one of the biggest Union Churches in the world, with my wife, Shirley, and our brand new little two-year-old daughter Anne. We thrived in the Manila Church and really learned how to relate to people of all different nationalities from all over the world. Shirley was able to offer nutrition classes and became a super Chinese brush painter during our years in Manila.

## **Manila During the Vietnam War**

**When you were in Manila were you connected to the Military Services in Vietnam?**

Navy Chaplains invited me to minister to them in Saigon and Danang. I also led Bible Studies with the U.S. Navy Chaplains in Subic Bay. The opportunity to meet with these chaplains on several occasions was very decisive and life forming for me.

Through this time of overseas ministry, it was clear to see that the family of God extends to all people around the world, regardless of race or differing cultures. We are all one family in Christ.

In 1970 I received a call from the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, the church I had gone to in college. So our family went to Berkeley and I was their Pastor for twenty-one years. Berkeley also became a great experience for us. These were turbulent years - times of student unrest and university upheaval.

## **Position on the Vietnam War**

**What is your position on the Vietnam War?**

I felt that it was an unwise war, but when it was underway and when it was over, I felt we needed to do the best we could to heal the wounds of the nation and to honor the people who had been sent by our nation to that war. We needed to heal our country. When I was in Manila, of course, I saw the war from that standpoint, having been up close to it. It was a heart-breaking war.

**Wars seem to be a difficult thing for me and for some Christians to accept.**

In a sense we stumbled into war because of our commitment to France. President Kennedy wanted us to be loyal to the French and tried to be loyal to the government they had put in place when the French came out of what was then French Indochina. The overwhelming fear of the domino effect of creeping Communism dominated American foreign policy. The thinking was that we had to stop Communist expansion before they encroached any further. That fear was evidently why John Kennedy felt we needed to stand with France and block the Southern expansion of the Communist regime of North Vietnam. It seemed to me that this was not wise. The British were wiser in not getting into a ground war in Malaysia. They realized they couldn't win a war in a jungle. It was a great tragedy. Now it's interesting, isn't it – since the war is over, we have gradually, and rightfully, been trying to make friends with the present day Vietnam.

## **War in General**

**I remember in World War II when anyone of Japanese heritage was felt to be an enemy and large numbers of innocent people were interred. Now, of course, we have sports heroes, politicians and businessmen and women as prominent citizens. This shows how national prejudices can be overcome.**

The Soviets, who once were our absolute and fearful enemy, are now friends. From a Christian point of view, it is important to focus on the people and to seek in building friendships with them.

**Humor is a good way to make relationships. There is a humorous story in the Cuban missile crisis; the Russian and American ambassadors get together and the Russian pounds his fist on the table and says: *"In America man abuses man ... (pauses) ... In Russia it's the other way around."* Everybody laughs and realizes he was joking and it brought forth an attitude of working together.**

**Changing the subject, I have read your new book titled “Trusting God.” I particularly like the way you deal with faith and doubt. We discuss this in a later chapter. When do you find time to write books like this?**

Writing is a continuous task. In an ordinary week I treat Thursday and Friday as my study days. Thursdays, I primarily work on sermons and on Friday I do research and writing.

**One of your excellent books is “The Twenty-four Hour Christian.”**

That book has been re-published. When my books go out of print, Regent College has been re-publishing them. (See list in Appendix)

## **Differences in The Theological Seminaries**

**Tell me about the difference between Princeton and Yale. There seems to be quite a difference that I never would have known of except for interviewing you and Dale Turner.**

Yale is going through quite a change right now. Recently, it was announced that Yale is severing its long-standing relationship with the United Church of Christ, and that is quite a controversial move. Yale is not going to be officially related to a denomination at all.

**Is that one of the liberal issues?**

I think it is just one more step towards the secularization of Yale, as it follows the path of Harvard. Harvard doesn't have a relationship with any denomination. Harvard was originally started as a school for pastors, as was Yale.

Princeton Theological Seminary has a different story. Princeton University was started as a Presbyterian School for pastors, just like Yale, but in 1812, Asherah Green, then the President of Princeton, decided that he wanted to start a separate school apart from Princeton University. It would be next door to the university but would have a separate institutional integrity and life. That was the founding of Princeton Seminary. The President of Princeton University was also the President of Princeton Seminary, but the

## SECTION I – EARLY EARL

school had its own faculty that could teach in both schools. Trustees might be on both boards. Princeton Seminary has grown and the seminary's land is now surrounded by university land. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the President of the Seminary was separated from that of the university. Princeton Seminary, founded in 1812, is approaching the celebration of its 200<sup>th</sup> year. I have been a member of the Board of Trustees for the Seminary since 1974.

Yale Divinity School is in a different place, being under the control of the university board as a department of the university. Historically Yale has always been a Divinity School belonging to the university. They didn't separate like we did at Princeton. If they were separate they would have their own board and more control over their destiny. Princeton is separate so we have our own budget and endowment. We have our own property.

**Theologically, Princeton and Yale Divinity Schools are quite different, aren't they?**

Princeton has probably been a little more conservative historically. When it comes to faculty, each school has absolutely incredible professors. Yale and Princeton try to steal professors from each other and several Yale professors have been trained at Princeton.

**Dale was warned that if he went to Yale he would become an agnostic or an atheist.**

I hope not! I know a lot of good Yale people. The Yale University Philosophy Department is one of the most conservative Philosophy Departments in American universities. In fact, Dean Robert Adams, who was Head of the Philosophy Department at Yale until his recent retirement, is on the Board of Princeton Seminary. We are good friends.

Yale has a terrific faculty. Professor Brevard Childs is the Old Testament Professor at Yale. Princeton would love to have him and we tried to hire him. He is outstanding. They have always been very strong in church history, too. Each school has its own strengths. We have strengths and they have strengths. Princeton Seminary has a very good relationship with Yale Divinity School.

### **What is your opinion of Harry Emerson Fosdick?**

I have a lot of respect for Harry Emerson Fosdick. I would not be theologically in the same place as he is. I would describe Harry Emerson Fosdick as a classic liberal in the most generous sense. He was a very generous human being in that liberal heritage. I know Dale Turner had a great, strong admiration for Harry Emerson Fosdick and Dale, I would say, was very much that way. He was a very generous and warm liberal in the liberal tradition. The mistake that I feel Fosdick made was to assume that strong conservative affirmations had to be by nature narrow and confining. I don't agree with that. I think like Bonhoeffer who, for instance, did not trust the liberalism that he saw at Union Seminary because he felt it was too empty of content, although it had a generous spirit. Bonhoeffer had a strong affirmation of truth from a more conservative fascination with the text and I am in that sort of mindset.

**Well, Earl, in this chapter we've covered your early years and next we'll move into your lifestyle and current beliefs in today's world. In these interviews my goal has been to preserve your light-hearted style of speaking while maintaining the depth of your messages.**

# **Life Story (“Early You”)**

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*These questions are offered for individual meditation or small-group discussion related to your early religious experiences compared to those of Earl Palmer as presented in the preceding chapter.*

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What religion did your parents have and teach at home?
3. Did you attend church regularly as a child?  
Which church?  
What memories do you have of your early church experiences?
4. Were you baptized?  
At what age?  
What memories do you have of this?
5. Are you a Christian?  
Describe the people and way that led you to be a Christian.
6. How did your faith affect you during high school?  
College?
7. Which people and books have had the greatest influence on your spiritual growth?
8. Have you had any miracles or religious “experiences” that have effected your beliefs?
9. Has any experience of nature or the wilderness effected your spiritual beliefs?
10. What would be your overall assessment of your early spiritual growth?



**EARL TODAY**

# EARL TODAY

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## Earl Today

*We've met Earl in the earlier years of his life; now it's time to meet him as he is today, still active in his 70's. I asked Earl a number of questions about his life today. His answers are not only interesting, but are inspiring – with his usual wit and humor.*

*One of the amazing things about Earl Palmer is the way he makes time for so many people and activities, keeping a rhythm to his life, week by week, as he describes in this chapter.*

### Being On Time

**I am impressed that you are always on time for our dialogues and your other appointments, in spite of a very busy schedule. Were you also on time when you worked in your church in the Philippines in Manila?**

I was an American in Manila and it's funny – you can't take an American out of his skin, so I tended to be more work-driven and more action-oriented than my Filipino friends. The Filipinos tend to be a little more casual about when a meeting is going to start. I'm very big on meetings starting on time, but in the Philippines, starting and ending meetings on time was not considered a great virtue. But the American in me wants to start on time and end on time, and yes, when I was in the Philippines it was good for me, because interpersonal relations cannot be timed or clocked. The Filipinos are very interpersonal.

**A lot has been written about being on time. I was driving up north to give a lecture on stress management. I had a late day in clinic and found I was going to arrive late for my own lecture on stress management. As I thought about being stressed, it occurred to me, *"This is ridiculous — the only thing that is making me stressed is looking at the car clock. I'll just set the clock back and arrive on time by car time."* So when I entered, I told the group, *"I am on time by car time and I'm sorry if I am late by any of your clocks."* The resulting laughter and my calm attitude left me stress-free for my lecture on stress.**

That's right! That's good. Well then, in another way, the Filipino in you would move the clock back because the important thing is the relationship we have when we get there.

## **Weekly Rhythm & the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

The Fourth Commandment:

*Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, for the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:8-11)*

**The Bible talks about time for work and time for rest and prescribes one day of rest of the Sabbath. If you are not to work on Sunday, what's a preacher to do?**

The meaning of the fourth commandment in the Bible is that we are intended to have a rhythm for work and rest each week. Proper Sabbath observance became one of the most prominent crises during the first century. It has continued to be a battleground during history since then. But it's a good law that says that the week you work in should be a balance between work and rest. And that's the key. On the Sabbath day we are mandated to glorify God. A doctor is glorifying God on a Sabbath day when he or she is doing surgery. And on the other hand, resting, glorifies God. The key is to have a rhythmic week in which you see your whole week with a balance to the glory of God.

**The Bible talks about six days for creation and a day of rest. I'm wondering when you get your day of rest?**

Obviously, Sundays are not my day off. Yes, I try to have a rhythmic week. The use of the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment shows a week as seven days. I try to follow that. I have 6 says of high energy and take one day for rest to study, read and to be quiet. I think that is the key to the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. I try to aim for that by seeing my whole week. I work very hard in the beginning of the week to the middle of the week, with meetings, lectures and classes offered.

## SECTION I – EARL TODAY

Thursday and Friday are ease-up days to study at home, to write, to research. Friday night is an evening we often go out for dinner or are with friends. Saturday is a day off to relax, and we stay home Saturday night to be rested for the new week that starts on Sunday with the five Sunday services.

**What if you don't get time to rest or if issues demand your time?**

Then I try to make up for it during the next week.

**What do you actually do day by day during a normal week?**

On Mondays I like to go work out at the Washington Athletic Club gym and come into the office at 11:00 a.m. Monday afternoon I am available for appointments for people, but no meetings are scheduled.

On Tuesdays I work out and often have breakfast with someone. At 11:00 I have a staff meeting and usually a business lunch with appointments following. Each week I am in a prayer group that has been getting together for fifteen years.

On Wednesday mornings at 7:00 I meet with young men in a prayer group of six here in my office. From 9:00 to 12:00 I meet with the senior staff. On Wednesdays at noon I attend Rotary Club #4 in downtown Seattle. These Rotarians are proud of the fact that the downtown Seattle club was the fourth Rotary Club to be formed in the United States. This Rotary Club is not only one of the first of many thousands of clubs, it is also one of the largest in the country. They are a great bunch of men and women, and they do a lot of good works. I enjoy their fellowship very much.

On Thursday afternoons I prepare Sunday's sermon.

On Fridays I write books, do research and write social letters.

On Saturdays I do relaxing activities, staying home most of the time.

On Sundays I usually lead five church services, at 8:30, 10:00 and 11:30 a.m. and 5:00 & 7:00 p.m.

**Where do you like to go for vacations?**

We have a cabin on Whidbey Island that we enjoy. It's quiet and restful there. Sometimes I'm a speaker on cruises, and that is always a nice way to mix spiritual times with vacation time.

## Holidays

### **What do you think about secularization of holidays? Santa Claus at Christmas and Bunnies at Easter?**

I tend to have a benign approach to that, because we have a greater idea on our side. So I don't think we should be too worried about the fact that others have crowded in on our celebrations. Because these are great events I'm not surprised that retail stores have crowded in. But you've got to remember this too — that Christians are the ones who crowded in on a Roman holiday. In the Roman era, slaves got a day off only on Roman holidays. And so the Christians started to celebrate Christmas on the Roman Holiday

## Major Accomplishments



### **What do you consider are your major accomplishments?**

...that Shirley and I, by God's grace, have watched three beautiful children grow up to be wonderful adults and parents, married to terrific life partners.

My career as a Presbyterian Pastor has been totally rewarding, and I think I have done a good job as a pastor. I have been in three churches with a great sense of reward. The response I have is that they feel that I did a good job.

## **Retirement**

### **Do you plan to retire? \***

Retirement sometimes means you stop what you are doing and then go into a rest mode. Your work may cease. My view on retirement is that you should do what you do well and do it as long as you can do it. As long as you are enjoying your work and are not an obstructionist with your age, but you are encouraging younger people and helping them – and if your mind is clear, then I think it's best to continue to keep busy and do useful work.

***\*NOTE: In 2007, after years as Senior Pastor at UPC, Earl has announced his plans to move on to do more traveling, consulting, writing, and lecturing through Earl Palmer Ministries, a newly formed non-profit corporation. This will allow him to be a resource to a larger number of people. He will make this move when a senior pastor is found to follow him in his position.***

## **Gun Control & Toy Guns**

### **What is your opinion on guns?**

I believe in gun control. I am not against hunting rifles if properly purchased and used. I am against high-powered rifles that are not hunting rifles or handguns that are violent weapons and I think that society should not make them available. I don't believe there is any purpose for automatic weapons or handguns to be available for public use.

***“When guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns” and the Constitutional “Right to bear arms” should not be arguments against gun control unless we think any minor, crazy person, mobster, terrorist, or criminal should have free access to***

**firearms. “Control” does not imply elimination of licensed weapons.**

**Enough of this topic! But what do you feel about toy guns and war toys for children?**

I think there should be reasonable restraint of weaponry, but kids need to play games.

**I always wondered if kids should be raised with toy guns ... you know, “bang, bang you’re dead!” But, as a child, I had a “Teddy bear army” and fought many imaginary foes. From dinosaurs to electronic space war games, imaginary violence seems to be part of growing up. And I’ve had a lot of laughs with squirt guns –but more with a squirting stethoscope I devised for my clown character, Dr. Quack.**

I know, my kids played with toy guns and I remember one neighborhood boy who seemed to be ambushing people on the street all the time with his toy guns, but he turned out to be a nice guy. In fact, he turned out to be a very gentle man but, as a little kid, he was shooting machine guns all the time.

## **Stem Cell Research & Responsibility in Science**

**Next, we’ll shift gears and touch the sensitive area where science and spirituality meet in the area of stem cell research. What do you feel about stem cell research?**

I think it’s very exciting to see what scientists can do in research that may benefit Parkinson’s Disease patients and others. Since I am not an expert in this area, I don’t comment in detail but I do think there have to be some more restraints on what scientists should enter into. There is a slippery slope whenever humans are used in research and fortunately it looks like stem cell research can be done without destroying fetuses. Research can be unethical and I think there have to be controls and restraint. Medical researchers, physicians and scientists have to step up and own responsibility.

## Care For the Dying

### **What are your views in care for the dying?**

I do believe in the principle of patient autonomy, that patients definitely, when their thinking is clear, should decide how many invasive procedures they want, especially as they get older in life. I think that for a young person we should use every invasive procedure possible to save the persons life. I think an old person needs to write protocols, possibly toward the end of life. They have a right to do that, and should do that. I don't think the Hippocratic oath should be wrongly read. *I don't think the goal of science should be to extend dying.* The oath is meant to do good and to alleviate suffering – do no harm, but not to extend dying. I feel that there needs to be great wisdom in stewarding this. I recoil at the idea of euthanasia. Euthanasia implies that there is such a thing as a “good death” and that a person should be encouraged to have assistance in termination of his or her own life. It seems to me that is a very dangerous area to enter. The family that has a very wealthy uncle or aunt might be tempted to have someones life shortened for the inheritance. Ideally, that person should have a protocol (ADVANCE DIRECTIVE) regarding which medical invasive procedures will, and will not, be done.

**As you know, I'm part of the HomeDoctor program, and I am really learning a lot. Part of this is keeping alive folks who aren't able to hear or communicate. Somehow this seems right. I can't explain why. To go in there and say that this person is of no use, pull the plug, seems wrong.**

I agree.

**One of the most prominent diagnoses we make in treatable disorders is depression. So some of these feelings may come out of depression which itself is an illness that can be treated. I rather liked your statement the other day about the person who came in and said he was going to commit suicide and you said, “You can't do that – you have no right to make that judgment.” I wonder if the same is true near the natural end of life.**

**One of the conclusions I have come to is that we should focus on the condition of the person before they seek to have their life end. If they were really highly functional, you may not honor their wish to die.**

**As you know, I had a serious ski accident and developed ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome) and was in a coma for over thirty days. Prior to the accident I was in very good physical and mental condition. After two to three weeks some of the physicians wanted to ‘pull the plug’ on the ventilator, but Bob Watson, the physician in charge, and my family and friends, wanted to continue life support systems. I’m glad I didn’t have a Living Will opposing the use of such systems, since here I am today. I believe my survival was due to love and prayer, as well as excellent medical care. I discuss this in my book *“Beyond Medicine.”***

**My medical training of care for invalid and elderly people was at large institutions.**

**I think a smaller home sitting is better for a person than being in a big institution where you can be forgotten.**

**People with Alzheimer disease, Downs Syndrome, and other chronic disabilities may do quite well in assisted living facilities and in adult family homes with six or fewer residents. This represents progress in care of the aged. A number of people are also cared for in their own home, with Visiting Nurse Services and other services including home doctor visits.**

**Allow me to insert a bit of humor at this point:**

**There was this man who had been sitting in front of a TV set all day when his wife came in, saying to him, “You know, honey, you really should take time to fill out the papers for a living will.” He replies without looking at her, “Whenever I am in a vegetative state and can’t communicate, then pull the plug.” Without saying anything, she quietly walks over and pulls the plug to the TV set.**

**Speaking of “death humor” ...**

**A man said, “When I die I want to die peacefully in my sleep like my grandmother ... not like the three terrified passengers that were riding with her at the time.”**

**Having discussed the topic of euthanasia, albeit briefly, let’s move on to another controversial topic.**

## **Addictions**

**What is your thinking about addictions? What comes to your mind when you say the word addiction?**

The irony of addiction is that it may be something good in small quantities but becomes a focus of obsession until it owns the person. Take the power of sex or food, for instance. In balance these are good, but when overdone, may become close to idolatry. It may create an insatiable appetite. As obsession sets in the person ends up worshipping or desiring intensely that which originally was wanted only in a controlled amount.

Power may also become an addiction. Everybody wants a little bit of power to feel important. Everybody has this need. I think that’s natural, but when a person has an insatiable desire to be on center stage, to have everybody pay attention to him or her, or when the person is driven to be in control of others in order to keep power, that is an addiction.

**Do you have a general approach that you feel works for treating addiction?**

I think the best cure for a physical substance addiction is the medical path. You’ve got to go cold turkey, which means you’ve got to go through withdrawal symptoms with medical help. You may need a new medication to get away from the addictive substance.

But with ordinary addictions, I think that the cure has got to be pretty much the 12-step program, like the AA program (Alcoholic Anonymous) and a spiritually-based program.

**Addiction to substances or activities is related to the phenomena of habits, obsessions, compulsions, emotional dependence,**

**fixations, controlling behavior, narcissism, bi-polar disorders, patterns of behavior, rituals, cravings (e.g. salt or sugar), gambling, smoking, gum chewing, diet pop, coffee/tea or other areas of drinking, feeling or behaving in a repetitive pattern. Even health behaviors related to diet, nutritional supplements or exercise can become addictions, as can sports – as a participant or spectator. Television is a common addiction, which may include sports, hero worship and obsession with celebrities. Pornography in various forms can become an addiction. Other addictions can be clothes, shoes, and shopping in general. E-mail and computer games can dominate and become addictive. Gossip is a destructive obsession. Excitement is sometimes a craving and legal or illegal exciting activities can become addictive and some may lead to destructive lifestyles.**

**I include spiritual counseling as part of my care for all patients with addictions. I try to find out their goals in life and help them form a type of “healthy addiction” with a support group such as a church. Even in a large church such as UPC, there are special groups where a person can become involved. Many patients who have addictions are basically lonely and churches can provide small groups that become “healthy addictions.”**

**Exercise and hobbies, along with religious activities, should be examined to find out what fits each individual.**

That’s wonderful. I’ve watched these things happen here. I’ve watched lonely people find a new way of relating to others and of living their lives with healthy goals. I agree with your idea of breaking addictions by finding a better addiction. Sometimes you may have to have medical help to make a change.

**Food addiction is one of the most common addictions. It has been said, “food is the drug of choice” for many conditions. If the body is “the temple of the soul” then why is the temple so large in many people? Is it “unchristian” to be obese?**

**In our weight loss program we treat obesity as a medical problem with psychosomatic components. We have six steps for six months to break a food addiction and lose body fat to a healthy level.**

**Food addiction is even tougher than smoking or alcohol addiction, or drug dependence. These addictions can be stopped, but one can't stop eating.**

That's all very interesting and addresses an important problem.

**How do you control your weight?**

I try to eat a healthy diet, which is basically all my wife will serve me. I exercise regularly.

# Earl Today

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*These questions are offered for individual meditation or small group discussion related to your religious experience. Compare your views to those of Earl Palmer as presented in the preceding chapter. I suggest you take one topic or a few at most, since so much can be said on each of these topics.*

1. Are you usually on time for appointments?
2. Do you obey the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment? Discuss your weekly rhythm.
3. What do you think about the secularization of religious holidays?
4. What do you consider as your major accomplishments?
5. What role does religion play in your life?
6. What do you feel about:
  - Capital punishment?
  - Gun control and First Amendment?
  - Toy guns and children's toys depicting violence?
  - Stem cell research? Cloning?
  - Euthanasia? Right to death?
  - Birth control?
  - Abortion? Right to life? Woman's choice? Father's choice?
  - Addictions: - Discuss differences between addiction and dependence, compulsion, habit, obsession, fixation, control, healthy or unhealthy, narcissistic, bipolar, eating problems, eating patterns, sexual behavior, rituals, gambling, smoking, sports (player or spectator), internet, computers, television, running, exercise programs, shopping, collecting ... and the list goes on.
  - Relationship stress, abuse, divorce, dominance

# **BECOMING A CHRISTIAN**

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# BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

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*This chapter discusses Earl's process of becoming a Christian. Some answers come from our dialogue and some answers are from his book, "The 24 Hour Christian" published in 1987. This book gives a thorough discussion of Earl's commitment to the total sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.*

## **When did you realize that you wanted to be a Christian?**

My family was generous, enthusiastic, encouraging – but not particularly religious. I stopped attending church after high school and church was not part of my life in my first two years at the University of California at Berkeley.

In the middle of my sophomore year a friend, Arba Hudgens, invited me to a Bible study. That small group made a deep impression on me. That summer I attended a conference where Bob Munger said, *"When you are willing to trust in the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ, then you are ready to become a Christian."* I felt he was speaking directly to me. I can remember going down to the lake and deciding that I wanted to trust in the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ.

## **Who else encouraged you in your movement toward being a Christian?**

I had a number of mentors who were important in my personal development. My parents encouraged me to think for myself. Dallas U. Birch, my sixth grade Sunday School teacher, made me feel good about myself as a young boy. My high school teacher Mrs. Zelma Gerlicher convinced me that I was smart. My college classmate Arba Hudgens first invited me into Christian fellowship. I had a number of friends who supported me. These included Henrietta Mears, Dick Jacobson, Dale Bruner, Floyd Thatcher, Bill Miller, Peter Yuen, David Gill, and John Blaul, and the list goes on.

## **SECTION I – BECOMING A CHRISTIAN**

**Yes, I remember quite clearly one of your sermons where you told the story of Arba as a “reluctant evangelist.” He was looking out of a window during a Bible study and was asked to evangelize someone. You happened to be walking by at the time and he said, “I’ll choose him.” Then he used reverse psychology by saying all the reasons he imagined why you would not want to come to the Bible study group. In any case, you attended.**

**Tell me some of the other people who were your mentors.**

Bob Munger modeled integrity in ministry and John Mackay showed me the vast dimensions of the kingly reign of Christ.

**What do you mean by “the vast dimensions of the kingly reign of Christ”?**

The “kingly reign of Christ” is a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer where he describes the kingdom of God. Bonhoeffer’s point is that the Lordship of Christ extends over all of life. A lot of people want to save a little space for God and don’t want Him to affect the whole of life.

**What was it about John Mackay that made him the “greatest preacher” you ever heard?**

This doesn’t say that he was necessarily the greatest preacher in the world, but he had the greatest influence on my preaching style. He always established the biblical text before anything else. He carefully established the text from the Old and New Testaments, helping us to understand what was going on in the text. He would then speak about the implications of the text. That’s the way I preach. I always try to establish the setting of the text, it’s historical setting, analyzing what the text says and means in its Biblical setting. Then I try to interpret it. The influence to be that kind of preacher came from Mackay.

**Do you have any current mentors?**

The greatest would be John Stott of England. Others of my influential mentors are Darrell Johnson, Dale Brunner, Darrell Guder and Tom Gillespie (of Princeton).

## **Bible Study & Becoming A Minister**

**How did you decide that you wanted to become a Christian minister?**

In the middle of my senior year at Cal I asked my pastor, Bob Munger, if I should be a minister. "Why don't you apply to Princeton Seminary and see?" he replied. I did and was accepted —probably the "rawest and greenest" recruit they'd ever had.

**I read in your book, *The 24 Hour Christian*, that you started a small Bible study group at Princeton.**

Yes, and in fact I ended up involved in five of these groups at one time because other groups began to ask me to help them out.

**On page 37 of *The 24 Hour Christian* you refer to the Barrington format, that you brought from U. Cal Berkeley, which you refer to as a simple quasi-inductive method of studying together different books in the New Testament. I am amused by your statement, "*Some weeks the Apostle Paul won and some weeks he lost.*" You note that you called these groups, "*investigative Bible study groups*," commenting that you do not like the term "*evangelistic study group.*"**

Why carry special baggage to Bible study? Let's just study the text and let God do the evangelizing. My ministry in California, Princeton, Manila and Washington has been founded on the basic premise that if I can get people to consider the text seriously it will do its own convincing.

**Some people worship the Bible itself and I note that you say, "*The Bible itself prohibits such idolatry.*"**

We worship the Lord of the Bible who is the Living Word to which the real people who wrote the Bible bear witness. In my book I explain what I see as the meaning of "Biblical theology." For visions and for all of the experiences of God's grace we are grateful, but they are neither our message nor the source of our message. We do not proclaim our experiences as if they were the Good News. Rather we must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the Good News. The Jesus Christ we preach is the historical Jesus, and the only authoritative witness to that gospel is the Bible. This means

that the authority for the church is not the church, not the existential experiences of signs and wonders experienced by Christians, not the challenging new visions of spiritual leaders, not the revolutionary imperatives of this new historical era, not the safe status quo priorities of the present social majority. **The texts point to God's own self-disclosure.**

## **The Garden of Eden – One Wonders**

**What do you think about the Garden of Eden? I think of this as a symbolic story, not an actual place.**

I don't have any problem with that in this regard. Genesis 1 to 11 is prehistoric writing. From Abraham on (Chapter 12 of Genesis) you are in recorded history from about 1800 B.C. We know where Babylon is. We know the name Abraham is a Babylonian name. We can track the journey. You can't do that with Eden. You can't find the Cherubim that were placed at the entrance to the garden with flaming swords. You ought to be able to track them with a satellite if they were still there. No one could find the Cherubim that guarded the garden. It obviously was a symbolic reference. And where is the Garden of Eden? It is a saga narrative.

We ask the question: What is Moses trying to do in that saga account? He is trying to establish that creation occurred and why – and not how it occurs. He does not make use of Egyptian Science of his day to explain the "How" of creation. We ask the wrong question of the saga accounts when we insist they be treated as scientific books – they are not scientific books. They are narrative theological books. We should ask, what does the writer mean when he uses this language and what is he trying to teach? I think we have the right as an interpreter to always ask that of a Psalmist or any song writer (even with contemporary songs). What does George Gershwin have in mind with *The Rhapsody in Blue*? We know he includes the street sounds of New York City and yet they are not street sounds. When you listen to *Rhapsody in Blue* you can hear Brooklyn because it was actually written for the concert hall in Brooklyn. You can hear streetcars; you can hear the screeching of horns ... but not really. It's instruments, it's trumpets, a piano player ...

# Noah's Ark?

## Could you say the same thing about Noah's Ark?

Yes, I don't think our interpretation should argue that there was a flood that covered the entire world. We don't have any record of the whole world being completely inundated with water all at one time. Floods are recorded, but not to have wiped out the entire created order, in which two of each animal are survivors. What are the lions going to eat – all of the other animals on the ark? But I think this is not asking the right sort of questions – asking Moses to explain how the animals came to survive. Furthermore, two of each animal would end up immediately with incest and, as you know genetically, with incest, you are going to have a deterioration of the species immediately. Moses has a profounder narrative underway in Genesis Chapters 1-11.

## As this point I'll throw in a joke question that stumps many persons even if biblically well informed:

*How many animals of each type did Moses take on the Ark?*

*Answer: to the momentary chagrin of the biblical Scholar, the answer is "none".... Moses didn't have an ark, but Noah did.*

**While agreeing that the Bible is the basis for Christianity, how do you feel about the claims of individuals such as the Quakers who believe in direct communication with God? Is it possible that prayers to God are answered directly from God?**

Jesus says, *"If you have seen me you have seen the Father,"* and he invites us to pray directly to the father. "Our Father prayer" is not a prayer to Jesus, but is a prayer to the Father. But it is proper to pray to Jesus too. There are prayers to the "Holy Spirit" too, and that is perfectly proper also. But the Holy Spirit points to Christ and Christ points to the Father and the Father points to Christ. Therefore all prayers are to the Father. In a sense we pray in the name of Christ, and we are invited by Jesus to claim Christ's authority as he plays his intermediary role with the Father.

## **Differing Opinions & Choices**

### **How did you choose to become a Presbyterian?**

I chose the Presbyterian Church because I became a believer in Jesus Christ within that fellowship. That doesn't mean Presbyterianism is right and Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholicism is wrong.

I'd rather not enter that territory of preferences with other churches. I'd rather say, "*One wonders.*" How sure God must be of himself that he can allow diversity of all these churches. The poet, W. H. Auden, has an interesting line. He says, "*We try to write the truth and with our own hand we smudge what we write but it can still be read.*"

There are no perfect churches. Every church smudges when it writes, but the Gospel can still be read through the smudge. In fact, some churches may teach a lot of questionable themes, and yet we will meet a person who has been in a church like that and who still has met the Christ of the Holy Bible.

As I see in my task is not to police everybody else's journey, but I do want to be wise and share the truth in a way that will be helpful to them. I found that if I put myself in a judging role why should they listen to me at all? I'd rather be less judgmental and more generous towards Christians who are in other places in their walk, and in that way I can learn from them and they can learn from me.

### **Which of John Calvin's doctrines do you cherish and which do you dislike?**

Calvin was on the side of the reformation that was strong on the position that Doctrine must derive its authority from Bible, not from church traditions, although tradition points to the truth.

He felt that the durability of the church is the Holy Spirit creating believers in Jesus Christ as they hear and trust the Word of God. For him, therefore, the communion table, instead of the altar, is the center of worship. The people of God surrounded the table to hear the Word and to experience the shared gospel. Calvin was very big on teaching the Word of God and the implications of the Word for the whole of life.

**The pre-Protestant Catholic model of the Bible, as I understand it, was that the Bible was to be read only by the Pope and clergy, and not by the common person. Luther and the Protestant Reformation brought the Bible to everyone. (Now most hotel rooms have a copy, thanks to the Gideon's Society!) Bible discussion groups are an important pathway to Christianity as it is lived today.**

Yes, the Reformers wanted the Gospel in and among the people, and in the directives in Vatican II. The Roman Catholic Church now advocates lay study of the Bible.

**Any ideas of Calvin that you do not agree with?**

The emphasis of Calvin on the Word was so concerned about theology that sometimes he was too sure of himself and ended up with doctrinal inflexibility. He wanted the Word to have all of the authority with the theologians and pastors surrounding the Word. So in a way, there can be arrogance from the Calvin side too. Rebellious against the Pope, a Reformer might create a number of little popes – who are too certain of their own interpretation of texts and themes.

John Knox, who was a Calvinist, was often as arrogant and as narrow as a pope. He was Word-centered, not Pope-centered. Although Scotland was one of the poorest countries in Europe, it was one of the highest educated at every level of society. Why? Because John Knox, coming from Calvin, wanted everybody to be able to read, so they wouldn't be a victim of any pope or any priest, either from Rome or from London. The Scots became so sure of what they held that they were not able to learn from others and definitely not from the Catholics. Scottish Presbyterians were not able to learn from other believers because they were so sure of their own doctrines. In a way there was a lack of mellowness that marked their zeal.

**George Fox goes further than that. The Quakers – the Religious Society of Friends, or simply “Friends,” worship even without priests or pastors between man and God.**

Then each lay person might become a pope. We need each other to keep us mellow. Right now the Protestants need the Catholics and the Catholics need the Protestants and we both need the Eastern Orthodox churches. We haven't been in touch with them for years,

but now we are getting in touch with Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters again. They are marvelous Christians.

## **Mellowing With Experience**

**What changes have occurred in your own theology since Princeton?**

I think I have mellowed a lot. I think I have less need to be right all the time and am more generous of other peoples' views, and also, I hope, more confident that God is able to protect himself and is able to preserve the truth. I don't have to be the one that protects everything all the time. Maybe that comes also with raising kids. I have become a little more confident that the gospel, over the long haul, will defend itself. My job is to do my best to be faithful to it, but I don't have to be a warrior looking for foes. I can be a servant. I don't have to fight about it.

**It seems you are a softer evangelical – more mellow.**

I think I've had the kind of journey that comes from friends but it also comes from getting a chance to see that, given time, the gospel of Christ makes its own case. You just have to relax, step back and let it happen. My job is to get out of the way.

**I've always tried to avoid being evangelical, but I'm more so now, talking to patients about spiritual matters more openly.**

In a way you have paid your dues and have the right to do it by the fact that they know you are not a person taking advantage of them. That's where I think an older person can be more forthright than a younger person because an older person has a track record. That track record creates its own credibility.

## **Radio & Website Ministries**

**One of the easiest first steps I suggest to patients to bring them closer to a spiritual foundation in Jesus is to recommend listening to the Sunday 10:00 a.m. radio service of UPC on AM Radio KCIS, 630 on the dial. It's easy to ask them to "tune in" which takes no risk of going to church. Many of them also are housebound or do not like to go places alone.**

We have a lot of people listening to our worship. Also, anyone can write to the church and we will send them a weekly bulletin by first class mail, arriving on Saturday in time to follow the Sunday service.

The 10:00 a.m. sermon is also on the UPC website: [www.UPC.org](http://www.UPC.org). This opens the sermon to the whole world.

## **Every Member a Minister & Encourager**

**I like the message on the UPC weekly church bulletin that says, “Every member a minister.” This reminds me of the Quaker statement, “There is that of God in every person.” This does not mean that people are gods, but God’s breath of life is a gift for all of us and we can each pray to God directly.**

Yes, what we mean by “*Every Member a Minister*” is that every believer has a ministry. In this church we want each believer to find the place where their life can minister to other people. In a sense it is an attempt to put in modern language what Luther meant when he spoke of the “*priesthood of all believers.*”

**I am very impressed and encouraged by your lecture series on encouragement. Your book indicates that encouragement has been important to you since childhood. Are many churches also preaching this theme? Is this fairly unique at UPC or is this now a common theme in churches? Because it wasn’t part of my early religion, I never heard much about encouragement.**

That’s a good question to think about. I can’t speak for all churches, but the words “encourage” and “edify” in Greek mean to come alongside in order to build up. “Encourage” then means both to come along side and build up.

I would think that right now a lot more churches are alert to the importance of being “encourager,” where people come alongside. There is more awareness in the need of fellowship. We are not meant to be alone. We are meant to be encouraged by one another.

I do think there is more awareness of that now in the Christian community, whereas, before churches might have been a little more on the exhortation side of encouragement, trying to scold or urge us to do what was right but not in the sense of coming

## SECTION I – BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

alongside to encourage us to do what is right or to model it. I don't think scolding works. A little bit goes a long way.

**My mother used to encourage me to tell the truth by saying, “It must be true because you always tell the truth.” She never would say I was lying. “Honest, sincere appreciation” (according to Dale Carnegie, I believe) is an important part of encouragement. (See Appendix 1)**

### **A Weekly Rhythm**

**I appreciate your chapter, “The Mind Alive” (Chapter 7 of *The 24 Hour Christian*, pages 73-81). I like your division of life into weekly compartments. In medical school I was influenced by the writings of the great physician Sir William Osler who preached living in “day-tight compartments.” Any comments?**

I owe a debt to the 10 Commandments. The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment takes life and describes our lives in terms of balancing within a period of seven days and that made a big impression on me, that our life is not described in terms of a month, or in terms of a year, or a day, but in terms of a week. I thought to myself, “Yes,” it makes sense to see your life within a rhythm of seven days. That's where I got this idea of a rhythm to each week. This means that within seven days, I should find the main ingredients of a healthy, balanced life. I shouldn't say that three months from now I am going to have rest. No, I need to rest this week. We need physical exercise this week. We need time to think and write this week. We need time with our families within the seven days. I just feel that this is the model that comes from the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. It's not the specific day that matters but the balanced rhythm.

**Some churches, like the Seventh Day Adventists, preach that a specific day is for rest.**

The principle of the seventh day, Sabbath, is that your life should have a rhythm of rest and work. The key is to have your life rhythmic. That means that a person who is a CPA and sitting in an office all week, should go out and play ball with the kids on the Sabbath Day. He or she should be physically active on that day and shouldn't sit around after sitting all week. In other words, his or her

life should be rhythmic, and I think that's the key to the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

**How about doctors and preachers and others who work on that seventh day?**

Years ago, when we had an agrarian society, families did physical work all week and set aside Sunday for rest and worship. As long as you have a rhythmic week, your week can be balanced out with other times for rest and worship.

**Earl, this has been an illuminating trip through your inner-self, becoming a Christian and a mentor for countless individuals. We could go on at greater length but it is appropriate to move ahead in this dialogue to some specific personal questions in which we can learn your views on many interesting and controversial issues.**

## **Prayer**

*Dear God, may those of us who believe we are agnostic or atheist come to understand the meaning of Christianity and the significance of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. May those of us who are Christian believers be strengthened. Help us to achieve a weekly rhythm with a balance of activities anchored in Jesus Christ. Amen*

## **Becoming A Christian**

# **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*These questions are offered for individual meditation or small group discussion encouraging you to examine your own journey of becoming a Christian. The following questions relate to the preceding chapter and to Earl's 1987 book, "The 24 Hour Christian."*

1. When did you first realize that you wanted to be a Christian?
2. Who were your mentors, heroes and encouragers leading you to the Christian life?
3. Were there aspects of your church experience and certain "Christians" driving you away from the church?
4. Has Bible study played an important part in your becoming a Christian?
5. Do you believe that all of the Bible has to be interpreted literally as "word for word" truth?
6. If you have chosen to belong to a particular church, why? If you have chosen not to belong to a church, why?
7. What do you think of radio evangelism? Have you ever listened to UPC radio service on Sunday at 10 am on AM radio 630 KCIS? Do you have any reactions or suggestions?
8. Do you believe any war is a bad war?
9. What does the UPC motto mean: "Every member a minister?"
10. How do you interpret the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment? Do you avoid working on the Sabbath?
11. Describe your weekly rhythm.



## SECTION II

# PERSONAL QUESTIONS

**The biography of a man as complex as Earl Palmer would not be complete without examination of his beliefs on controversial questions. The dialogues in this section on personal and theological issues bring out the Bible-based nature of Earl Palmer's belief structure. Each of the questions which I posed to Earl could have produced a book in itself, but the answers in this section are brief and cogent, allowing you to have a broad perspective on Earl's ideas. Whether you agree or disagree with his opinions you will find this section to be very stimulating. His answers to complex questions are never arrogant and my favorite response, which he gives to unanswerable questions, is, "*One wonders.*"**

The index at the start of this section allows the reader to survey the topics and choose those of most interest. At the end of Section II is an outline to stimulate discussion or personal meditation.

## PERSONAL QUESTIONS

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# PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Earl, ever since I was in grade school I have been interested in the meaning of life. When I first heard you speak, and read your books, I was drawn to you as a mentor. I welcomed the chance to ask your personal views on many important theological and everyday issues.

*You, the reader, may share some of the questions that I had the opportunity of asking Earl Palmer. Earl's responses are spontaneous and reflect his willingness to deal with any question, however complicated or naive it may be. Where there is controversy – as there will be – please stay open-minded. I like Earl's answer to difficult questions: "One wonders!"*

## Intelligent Design (The Creation vs. Evolution Debate)

**What do you think about 'intelligent design?'**

I believe that creation is by God's design, by God's decision. This is an affirmation of faith as a Christian believer. It is not a scientific description. It is a philosophical and theological affirmation. Scientists have rightly seen that the creative order is dependable. That's why they can do research. Otherwise you would never dare to calculate how to build a rocket to be able to go out to the moon and come back to the earth.

They counted on the fact that everything in this creative order is operating with what Einstein called a basic harmony. I cannot, for the life of me, see why this is such a hot issue except that some people have politicized it.

Science is trying to figure out how species develop and change through time. I don't want scientists warned against that task. On the other hand, there are those on the Darwinian side saying, "*Don't you dare sneak religion into the classroom with any affirmation about the meanings of creation.*"

In schools "Intelligent Design" should not be taught as "science." It's an affirmation that speaks to meaning and purpose.

## SECTION II – PERSONAL QUESTIONS

**How does one deal with the Adam and Eve story? Were Adam and Eve suddenly created as mature, adult humans?**

I think that's asking the wrong question of *Genesis 1*. I don't want to ask the question *how*, but ask the question *what happened?* Genesis is saying "*What*" and the "*how*" is really left as a marvelous mystery. The one thing that becomes clear in the epic account of Genesis is that the man, Adam, is made on day 6 when all of the rest of the created animals are made – the same day. In the Genesis account we learn of this continuity with the rest of the creation.

It doesn't bother me *how* God pulls it off, but what excites me is that *he pulled it off*. He created life in the Genesis view because of a grand purpose.

**This doesn't do away with evolution, does it?**

No, Genesis puts together the wonder of our human uniqueness and also our continuity with the animal kingdom. We don't have a day just for ourselves in Genesis. To take a strictly non-evolutionary view is saying that man has a day all for himself. Man is created in the sixth day of creation, the same day when everything else was created, and that is good. And yet, man is different from the ape – he is different than everything else, yet he has continuity.

**It's a little confusing to me, trying to figure it out.**

It is to me too, and I think it is a good confusion, it makes one wonder. I think it is good confusion and also makes you respect man very highly and makes you respect the animals highly.

## **Favorite Books In the Bible**

**The Bible is an amazing book. Do you have a favorite book in the Old Testament?**

I'd have to say Psalms is my favorite Old Testament book. I love the Book of Job for it's sheer beauty and I think it has a profound ending, too. .

**How about the New Testament?**

My three favorite books are - *The Book of Romans* and *The Book of John* and also *The Book of Philippians*.

**Of the various translations of the Bible, do you have a favorite?**

I think the New Revised Standard is my favorite. We use the New Revised Standard version here at the church but it is not the most beautiful. The most beautiful from an English language standpoint is the original authorized version of the King James Bible. On Christmas Eve when we observe the lessons and carols we use the King James Version. But other than that, for just a very good translation, I like the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

**One of the things that bothers me is that the Bible itself is said to be the absolute Word of God— but in what language? As you know better than most, when the Bible is translated from one language to another (i.e. to the Greek language) in the translation process the meaning can be affected. One that strikes me is, “Peace on earth – good will to men,” vs. “Peace on earth – good will to men with whom he is pleased.”**

I like that great text from Luke’s Gospel, chapter two. Yes, it could possibly be misunderstood. The text is clear – the angels are saying, “*Glory to God on the highest. on earth peace.*” And then the old King James translates it, “*Good will toward men.*” The Greek word is eudokia (good decision is the word). If the text is literally translated — it would be, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. This is the good decision of God toward men.*” Eudokia means “good decision” – the pleasing decision, good decision, that God has made in our behalf. I believe the King James rendering offers the best translation of that song – *good will toward men (the good decision of God toward men)*. God is pleased to grant peace toward men and women. It is the good decision of God.

**Your sermons often emphasized different interpretations of various words based on your knowledge of the original Greek. What does it mean to change the meaning of the Bible even if only in one word? How do we say the Bible is true word-for-word when the meaning of words changes?**

As a Biblical Christian I see the Bible as the faithful witness to the grand center – Jesus Christ. This is what “Biblical Authority” is

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all about for our faith. The Bible uses a number of literary forms leading us to its living center. When we say the Bible is literally true, we are not saying you can take every sentence in the Bible and press it in every direction. When it reflects on a subject such as science, it is not necessarily literally true. For instance, when Jesus says, “the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds,” it is not necessarily true scientifically because there are smaller seeds. Symbolically, it is a very small seed in the illustration by Jesus.

We always have to ask what a word means. Every sentence and every word has to be interpreted by asking, “What did it mean when first spoken in its own culture.”

We need to make one more step – what does the author mean theologically? What is he trying to teach with what he writes? That enables us then to realize that the Bible is using different kinds of literary forms in order to deal with themes that appear in the Bible. The Old Testament and the New Testament will not lead us astray but will always lead us to the Bible’s living center. The Old Testament anticipates the living center, and the New Testament points to and surrounds the living center – Jesus Christ. The living Jesus Christ is the authority center point, and the Bible borrows its authority from its living center. The Bible gains its authority and power by the fact that it points to, and surrounds, Jesus Christ. It’s a book written by humans who tell what they have witnessed.

That doesn’t mean that the Bible itself has to be a flawless document. Otherwise, it would make no sense that Luke would correct Matthew and Mark, or that John would correct Luke, Matthew and Mark. What you have is a group of honest people that are looking at a true event and describing it as they saw it. That is why there will be differences in the ways they see an event.

The Bible therefore gains its authority from its living center who is Jesus Christ. It’s not the other way around. I don’t start my journey by saying, “Since the Bible is the word of God, then I’ll believe what it says.” I read the Bible like I read any other book. It is a book that brings me to the living center in Jesus. Then it is the living center who wins me. The Jesus I meet in the texts wins my respect and finally my trust.

So it’s the Living Word that is the center of the Bible’s authority, and that is Jesus Christ. The Reformation Doctrine of the inspiration and authority of scripture sees this witness document as

the faithful witness to Jesus Christ, a witness that does not lead us astray because it points to the Living Center.

The difference between the Old and the New Testament is that in the Old Testament the law, Prophets and Psalms prepare us to meet Christ. In the New Testament Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul point us to Christ. The Jesus Christ that I meet in the Bible wins my respect (that's a few inches away from faith), and then I decide to trust him.

**Some of the churches I attended earlier in my life seemed to idolize the Bible itself. You have said that the Bible itself prohibits such idolatry.**

We worship the Lord of the Bible who is the Living Word to which the real people who wrote the Bible bear witness. I have written what I see as the meaning of "Biblical Theology." For visions and for all the experiences of God's grace, we are grateful but they are neither the message nor the source of the message. We do not proclaim our experiences as if they were "Good News," rather we must proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Good News. The Jesus Christ we preach is the historical Jesus and the only authoritative witness to that is the Bible, which means that the authority of the church is not the church itself, not the existential experiences of signs and wonders experienced by Christians, nor the challenging new visions of spiritual leaders, not the revolutionary imperatives of this new historical era, not the safe "status quo" of the present social majority. The text points to God's own self-disclosure.

Luther calls the Bible the crib in which we find Jesus. It's a human book written by ordinary human beings. That's why we discover all kinds of differences of portrayal within the scriptures, and they sometimes may appear to contradict each other. But they don't really, because they all point to a Living Center, and the Living Center is the one who wins my respect.

**In terms of following the Old Testament as authoritative, how can we understand many of the "commands" such as those in Leviticus? For example, Leviticus 44-46 indicates that you can**

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**buy male and female slaves from surrounding nations and pass them on to your sons as an inheritance. It seems to me that the Old and the New Testaments must be revered separately.**

**There seem to be inconsistencies in the Old Testament laws that go against our current values. For instance, is it okay to have a female slave as long as she is from an adjoining country?**

It's interesting, the only ancient law of the ancient countries of the Mediterranean world that had any protection of the rights of foreigners, is the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment of the 10 Commandments which protects the sojourner who dwells within your city. But it is true that you have a lot of community law in the Old Testament that needs to go through the Redeeming filter of its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

That is how I, as a Christian theologian, look at Old Testament vengeance passages. The Old Testament contains vengeance passages, for instance, where David wants his enemies killed. So what do I do with these Psalms of David? Do they make killing of enemies a proper act? No. That Psalm was fulfilled by the one who fulfilled David and that is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ disarmed David's wrath just like he fulfilled David's greatness. So the wrath of David is disarmed at the cross. Jesus steps in the place of even David's foes.

This is the importance of the cross of Christ as He takes and absorbs all evil and rage, even from the heroes of the Bible like David. All war scenes in the Old Testament need to be seen in light of the one who fulfilled them, when Jesus Christ became the enemy himself to absorb all terror. Therefore, we are now on this side of the fulfillment. Therefore we cannot read any of those texts without seeing them through the One who fulfills them.

The same with the meaning of women as slaves. St. Paul urged Philemon to set his slave free because Jesus Christ became a slave for all of us. And so, Old Testament texts come up within a culture and there are a lot of humane themes in those texts, as well as brutal ones, but they all come through their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

**I question our choice of names as we use "Jesus" or "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus Christ" or "Jesus Christ the Lord," or the**

**“Lord Jesus Christ.” It seems that sometimes the more intense a preacher gets, the more words he uses. Is there anything that leads to the use of one name or another?**

They are all proper. One is a title, of course – Christ is actually the Messiah’s title. Jesus is a name (Joshua). “Of Nazareth” is often how a man would be known by where he came from. So it would be common to say Jesus of Nazareth.

The minute they start saying Jesus Christ, then what we are really saying is that Jesus is the Christ and drop the “is” or simply say Christ Jesus and then we are saying the Messiah is Jesus. So all are proper names.

## **Fulfillment of the Old Testament by Jesus**

The Old Testament needs to be understood in the light of its fulfillment.

This fulfillment reality applies to Leviticus texts that are absorbed by Jesus Christ. Remember the woman caught in adultery who was thrown at Jesus’ feet with the people demanding an answer from Jesus about the severe command from Leviticus that called for a death punishment. His choice is between backing up the law or violating the law by supporting the woman. Jesus replies,

***“He who is without sin throw the first rock,”***

but he didn’t move. He stayed with the woman and bent over to write in the sand. They expected him to move away, but Jesus kneels down and writes in the sand (we don’t know what). So they who would intend to punish the woman would have to throw rocks with great accuracy. In fact, one by one they walked away. Jesus says to the woman,

***“Where are your accusers?”***

She replies,

***“They are gone.”***

He then does a beautiful thing. He says,

***“Neither do I accuse you, go and sin no more.”***

He fulfills the intention the Leviticus Law by calling her to the way of righteousness. And then comes the best part I love –

immediately following that incident Jesus says to the people,  
***“I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness.”***

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They have just seen the law fulfilled. He takes the Leviticus text and instead of throwing it away, He fulfills it.

### **“Are There Times”**

*Are there times when crowds decide in the emergency of desperate hurry who is guilty and who is not?*

*Are there times when ordered design conspires to squeeze away the smallest voice that asks for truth?*

*What happens after the mistakes of swift fury and cruel propriety? At these dread moments of crossroad terror I wished for a grand restraint.*

*Then by surprise I saw the Shepherd who carried stone tablets of Holy will. I saw the man who wrote in the sand to protect a crowd from their wrath and to give hope to a person hated and alone.*

*Now that dangerous crossroad with its crowded judgment corner is your place to stand. We need you here in our behalf because you know the Stone Marker in your hands and the Man who wrote in the sand.*

**Earl Frank Palmer ©**

**One of the things I am troubled about in Leviticus is the rule that a woman whose husband dies is not to have sexual relationships with another man after her husband’s death.**

Again, I think much of marriage law in the Old Testament is Bedouin influenced. Marriage law is fulfilled in a fuller way in the New Testament as it becomes the treasuring of two equals that erases the earlier technical legal constraints. You have to see Bedouin traditions in a cultural context. They didn’t have prisons, which is why they had so much capital punishment. The closest

thing to a prison would be the Jewish tradition of banishment. Then if they come back they are considered a hostile warrior. In marriage also, if you are a living in a Bedouin culture you can't have an unattached family. Then terrible things may happen. For example, when a man dies his wife comes under the complete mercy of the man's brother. A widow is left without any protection, because in tribal law the brother gains control of the house, the property and everything. This tradition may have been to preserve property for the tribe. These are cultural traditions that need to be now re-understood within the context of present realities. We now have prisons, therefore we don't have to have capital punishment. We can still protect the community without taking the life of the villain.

**In a sense you are interpreting the Bible in the times and culture in which it was written.**

## **Intent of Biblical Passages**

In interpreting the official Regulatory parts of the O.T. Bible, I believe we need to try to understand the intent, the reason for specific persuasions and the Perspective of the people and settings behind each passage. We should look for the grand positives that lie behind the particular law texts. The grand positive, for instance, of all the adultery and family laws of the Old Testament is to preserve the sanctity, wholeness and health of the family. That's the grand positive. When you get to the New Testament, obedience laws are framed in a larger context. Paul will say to fathers and sons,

*“Obey your parents in the Lord” and “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath lest they become discouraged.” (Ephesians 6:4)*

This advice from St. Paul interprets family law in terms of its positive goal – so that a boy or girl may grow up without being discouraged. The child grows up knowing that he or she is loved, not just a child who is obedient. Even in *“Obey your parents in the Lord,” (Ephesians 6:1)* there is protection. The Lord is still between the parent and the child. The gospel protection comes from the larger reading of the law rather than the small reading of the law. Therefore disclosures of authority are not seen isolated from God's larger goal of our lives.

## **The Kingdom of God**

**One of the concepts where I lack clarity is that of “The Kingdom of God.”**

Bonhoeffer says that when the phrase “Kingdom of God” is used in the Bible it really is referring to the “kingly reign of Christ.” In other words, it is not a territory, but a relationship. I think it is possible to become confused about Kingdom of God language. When we hear the phrase “Kingdom of God,” we may think of a territory or geography. For instance, much of modern prophetic teaching is concerned about the prophetic significance of Israel as a territory or the Territory of Palestine, as if that’s the kingdom of God. Bonhoeffer helps us to see that the New Testament is clear: “Kingdom language” is *relationship language*, relating to the King and knowing the King. That’s why the phrase “the kingly reign of Christ” is so wise. It points directly to our relationship with the King. That is the kingdom of God. *It’s not a place. It’s a relationship.*

**I am also confused about the term Abba that you used in a sermon recently. What is the meaning of “Abba Father?”**

Abba is an affectionate Aramaic word for “Father” like “Daddy.” So Jesus used this – “Abba Father.” And Paul says that the Holy Spirit “confirms in our hearts Abba Father,” so that we have an intimate knowledge of God the Father.

**Abba is seldom used in sermons, so I do not recall hearing it.**

Abba would not be used in most sermons because it is an Aramaic word, but it appears in the New Testament in the Aramaic, rather than being translated.

*(Aramaic is a Semitic language known since the ninth century B.C. as the speech of the Aramaeans and later used extensively in southwest Asia as a commercial and governmental language and adopted as their customary speech by various non-Aramaean peoples including the Jews after the Babylonian exile.)*

## **How does one deal with differences between the four gospels as different stories about Jesus are portrayed.**

Different narrators see things differently. That's why every one of the gospel records sees things differently. Take the incident of the young paralyzed man who was brought to the house to see Jesus. Matthew makes it very simple.

Mark makes it more complicated. They couldn't get in and he says they dug through the roof. That makes it look like an adobe type roof with straw and mud, which was a common type of roof construction in the first century smaller homes.

Luke is the last to write and he is writing a more orderly account and he says the roof was tile. That would make it a wealthy home, and that makes better sense to the context in the passage. Tiles are easy to pull out. You could pull the tiles out and you could lower someone through. But to dig through straw, mud and slats they would be up there for hours. Once you start pulling the tiles out, it would be like a puzzle to you.

When my son and I were in our archeological dig in 1997 our group found a Roman bath and they found many pieces of tile all over the ground. The officials let us bring certain things home, so I brought several pieces of tiles and they are just like modern tiles. The Romans brought in the tiles. There is one account with three narrators seeing it differently, but the miracle event is the same.

## **For some reason I am reminded of the three umpire joke:**

**Three retired umpires were arguing which one of them was the greatest. The first said, "There's balls and there's strikes. I calls 'em as I sees 'em." The second umpire says, "There's balls and there's strikes. I calls 'em as they are." The third umpire says, "There's balls and there's strikes. They ain't nothin' tills I calls 'em!"**

**Different people have different views of the same event. Anyways, that's my pitch!**

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**Speaking of reporting from a particular point of view, I have gained a lot of respect for St. Paul from your writings. I have come to think that here is a man who is very responsible for carrying Jesus forward in history to all people, not just the Jews.**

Your joke is funny and philosophical too. St. Paul is sometimes credited as being the one who created Christianity! I don't agree. St. Paul is in complete harmony with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and they are all in harmony with each other as to what is at the center. They are all convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.

There is no question, however, that Paul is the most brilliant among the writers. Paul grasps Greek philosophy and thought and his use of language is superb. Paul is certainly the intellectual giant of the New Testament. John writes more simply than does Paul, yet John's Gospel is a wonderful portrayal of the Living Center. So are the accounts of Mark and Matthew.

**How is the Old Testament message interpreted in light of the New Testament?**

I believe that the Old Testament – all of it – has to be taken with full seriousness, but it needs and deserves to be read in the light of The One who fulfills it.”

There is a great Bonhoeffer quote that helps: *“You cannot hear the last word until you hear the next-to-the-last-word.”* And the next-to-the-last word, in the John 8 Narrative of the woman caught in adultery, would be the Leviticus text that, in its own way, prepares us for the last words from Jesus. If we just say the last word without the next-to-the-last word, “grace without law,” then we do not really appreciate the fullness of grace.

## **Angular Biblical Theologians**

**This is fun – studying theology this way. I have heard you use the words “angular biblical theology.” What do you mean by this?**

“Angular Theology” is in contrast to “Systematic Theology.” Systematic Theologians prefer no contradictions. Everything is perfectly harmonized. If you are reading from the text itself there are jagged edges perhaps inconsistencies, as different authors write what they saw and felt. Differences in minor details give the

message “ragged edges” but the central message is always clear and consistent. There is harmony at the center even if there is not consistency in minor details. Does that make sense?

Having jagged edges makes the message more persuasive to me than if it were all forcibly harmonized. For instance, if you read Communist literature during the Leninist period, you will note that everything was perfectly harmonized – perfectly in keeping with the Communist Manifesto portrayed by Marx, Engels and Lenin. There were no jagged edges, nothing could be non-doctrinal or revisionist – it all had to be perfect, like a Communist novel where the proletariat must always win and the bourgeois must always lose. The New Testament has a lot of jagged edges that might throw you into a tailspin. Who was first at the tomb on Easter morning? Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all have different sets of women, so all we can say is that women were there first. But every list is different. But the point is that it is obviously a true event, being seen through different eyes, and different ways of being portrayed.

I, frankly, am impressed that the New Testament writers didn't collude to make it all smooth, which is a common danger of systematic theology, where the goal is that everything needs to be totally consistent, with no loose edges.

Biblical theology is willing to let texts stand in angularity with each other. In that sense, it is not smooth.

As an “*angular theologian*” I like to go past loose edges and focus on the central message.

## **The Bible As Allegory**

**One of the rough edges for me is the question as to whether the Bible is largely actual or allegorical. An example is a Communion service. I remember gagging as a boy, when told that the red wine was actually the blood and the bread was actually the body of Jesus.**

As reformed Christians we understand that The Holy Communion is a sign and a seal, as Calvin called it. The Roman Catholic Church now uses the phrase “real presence” which is different than transubstantiation as a way of understanding the mystery of the Lord's Supper.

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On the Thursday night when our Lord said to his disciples,

***“Do this in remembrance of me until I come again,”***

they were not eating his body and drinking his blood. They were having bread and wine as symbols.

**What’s the difference between wine and grape juice, or is there a difference between the use of wine or grape juice?**

In our denomination we can use either. For the worship services in the morning we use grape juice. For special times, we may use wine. In a way I kind of wish we did use wine, because with grape juice you have to worry about it molding. You have to keep it refrigerated right up to the last minute. It’s a big challenge for us to use grape juice. We do use it so that people with alcohol problems won’t stumble.

**Sometimes a humorous thought comes to mind during communion as we drink the wine (or grape juice): *“This was a good year.”***

Every year is a good year for grape juice!

## **Jews & Gentiles as Christians**

**History has proven that Christianity is a religion of Gentiles, although it began with the Jews, as Jesus was born a Jew.**

We need to be careful, though. In sheer percentages, the largest number of believers at the beginning were Jewish. The apostle Paul, in his travels in the Mediterranean world, went to the synagogues first. Many Greeks were attracted to Jewish monotheism. They are called Proselytes, and surrounded the synagogues, fascinated by the monotheism of the law and prophets message of Israel, and were disillusioned with the large number of Greek Gods. In sheer percentages, the largest number of Christians were Jewish people. In fact, the Roman government always related to Christianity in the first century as a Jewish sect. Christians were persecuted along with the Jews. As Christianity began to grow, a great number of men and women within the synagogue did not respond to Christ as Messiah.

**Since we share the Old Testament together, why is there such a division between Christianity and Judaism?**

Islam also claims the same root system as Christianity. In some situations Christians and Muslims have been very peaceful with one another. That's what is so sad about Lebanon where Muslims and Christians have gotten along so well. They did in Iraq too. In Iraq the Christian community is very small, but they co-existed with their Islamic neighbors for many years until al-Qaida stirred up sectarian fanaticism.

**I've always been uncomfortable with the position, "I'll get even with you." It seems to me that this is the root of many wars and personal conflicts. It's a position based on anger and/or a lack of forgiveness.**

In the Lord's prayer we pray,

*"... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

Forgiveness from God comes from God's grace. Forgiveness is possible because of grace. Forgiveness is a surprise. You wouldn't expect it. What we expect is consequences in life. We don't expect forgiveness.

## Grace

**How do you define grace? How does Grace relate to forgiveness?**

The source of the word 'Grace' is "Charis." In fact we use it that way. We talk about a charismatic person as a person with surprising gifts. Grace means "*surprise gift love*," a love gift when not expected.

As an example, we talk of, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me," by John Newton. John Newton is saying, who would expect that a wretch like me would be saved? Only grace will do that.

**Parable of the prodigal son for example.**

Yes, you expect consequences that would be punishment, and when forgiveness shows up you are surprised. That's why forgiveness fits with grace.

## **Forgiveness**

**It has been said, “It is easier to ask for forgiveness than ask for permission!”**

That’s interesting. Well, Karl Barth said that the Western Church mainly focuses on the theology of the cross. The Eastern Church (Russian Orthodox) has mainly focused on the theology of glory, so in a way the Eastern Church focuses more on resurrection and the future and the Western Church focuses more on the past and the resolution of our guilt and the resolving of our brokenness through forgiveness.

The broken relationship in human beings between ourselves and God is healed at the cross because Jesus Christ has disarmed sin, death and the power of evil. And so the Western Church (the Roman Catholic Church and we, as protestants) has a strong emphasis on forgiveness and on the grace that heals. The Eastern Church has a strong emphasis on victory, the resurrection and our future hope.

So, I think it is beautiful when we realize that we need both. We need both together - both the *forgiveness that resolves brokenness* and a realization that *forgiveness moves toward action – towards the future.*

**Sometimes as a teenager, when we planned for the future to stay out late, it was easier to ask for forgiveness when we came home late, than it was to ask for permission in advance to stay out late.**

## **God’s Title & Gender**

**That brings up the question that some of the Congregational Churches have gendered the Holy Spirit saying “Our Father and our Mother.” It still strikes me strange and awkward to say Our Father and Our Mother in the Lord’s Prayer.**

I don’t like to change the language in reference to God that is in the Bible. We know that God is greater than gender, because God is the author of both male and female. So in a sense God is our mother and is our father. And yet, the word “Father” is used to refer to God in the Bible and I don’t think it should be changed to satisfy a certain sensitivity to gender advocacy. I’d rather keep the Biblical language and then when we teach the meaning of the character of

God, we keep the sensitivity alive that God is greater than male and female.

## **Right Hand of God**

**Another thing that has confused a lot of people is the personification of God, and heaven as a place where Jesus is sitting on the right hand of God— as if literally, God has hands and God is a man.**

The right hand is a first century, or maybe even older than that, reference to authority. When it said in the creed that Jesus sits on the right hand of God, it is an ancient expression of the authority of Jesus Christ.

**What about personification of God as a man?**

We have the Biblical witness to that in the incarnation when God became man and lived

**And mankind.**

Yes, and He is the source, so that is why we have always seen Him in terms of a person who is far beyond and greater than any human. Yet, when God spoke for himself, He spoke as a man, Jesus Christ, so that Jesus was born of a woman, born under the law in full identification with our humanity - that is Jesus Christ, who is a man, and God willed that. God willed to become man.

## **Baptism & John The Baptist**

**Baptism is a central part of the Christian faith. The following questions are on my mind:**

- **Where did baptism begin?**
- **How did it get connected to Christianity?**
- **Were there others as famous as John the Baptist?**
- **From where did John the Baptist get his authority?**
- **Was early baptism by immersion? When did sprinkling on the head begin?**
- **Are there convincing arguments for one type of baptism vs. another? And for the age a person can/should be baptized?**

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- **What do you think about baptism after death?**
- **What do you think about re-baptism?**
- **Do you think there is any way someone can go to heaven without being baptized?**
- **Is there any way non-Christians can get to heaven?**
- **Do you have any other points you would like to make about baptism?**

**Regarding Baptism, one thing to clear up is between immersing like the Baptists do and sprinkling like the Presbyterians do.**

One point to remember first of all is that the baptism of John the Baptist is not the baptism that Jesus commanded when he said, “You shall baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” *John’s baptism is the baptism of repentance*, it’s a washing of repentance. The baptism of Jesus is our identification with Christ and his victory on our behalf. *That’s the baptism of the Holy Spirit.*

It is true that there is a whole branch of Christendom that feels in baptism that you should be immersed because John the Baptist did it that way. Baptist Churches are convinced that you should only be baptized when you are an adult believer. But most of Christendom believes in infant baptism because we see baptism as the fulfillment of the ancient sign of circumcision that was done in the 8<sup>th</sup> day of a boy’s life as a sign of the Covenant.

What fulfills the sign of the covenant in the New Testament is not circumcision but now is baptism. We don’t have a circumcision made with hands, but we have now this mark of water. And that’s why when Paul talks of baptism, he says it is neither male nor female, neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free. So now we have the fulfillment of that mark of the covenant and that’s baptism. When a baby is baptized we are claiming the promise for that little child.

We know that the early church did practice sprinkling because we have found some ancient baptismal fountains and they are basins rather than huge tubs. The reformed faith – our Presbyterian tradition – says that baptism can be by any mode. In fact every year we have university students who want to be baptized by immersion and we do it at Green Lake or Lake Washington. Three weeks ago one of my associates baptized twelve university students by immersion at their winter camp. An adult who wants to be

immersed can be immersed. Our Book of Order is very clear – we can do baptism by any mode, but ordinarily we sprinkle.

### **Do you ever do rebaptism?**

No we don't. If you are once baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit you're baptized. So we do not re-baptize because that would assume that your first baptism was not valid. But it is valid.

### **As an infant I was baptized with the words, The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Is that the same as the Holy Spirit?**

Yes, that's the same. Once you've been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit you were baptized, so we would not re-baptize you.

### **One controversial issue is "baptism after death."**

The Mormons practice that but that's not taught or practiced by other churches.

### **If a child dies without being baptized, what would you do if the family wants the child baptized?**

I certainly would baptize a child who is dying, but not after death. The sacraments are for the people, not the people for the sacraments. Baptism, as Calvin described it, is a sign and a seal. It's a sign of a greater reality; the greater reality is God's grace that we're claiming. We would never want to say that, "If you are not baptized you are in great danger." Baptism is a sign of God's love. It is God's love that we are claiming and you can claim that with or without baptism. But baptism is a sign of it, so we use the sign because we receive encouragement by that sign. On good Friday, when a thief asked Christ for help our Lord said,  
*"Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:43)  
The thief was not baptized but he received grace.

### **Earl, please explain the difference between dedication of babies instead of baptism of babies**

We offer a "Prayer of Blessing" for a child and family as they seek to raise their children towards adult baptism. Our counsel to parents: either present your children for infant baptism or prepare

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them for adult baptism. If you are preparing them for adult baptism we have a prayer blessing for that family in morning worship. They will introduce their baby and then we read a verse the parents have chosen for their child. Then we will pray for the family. We say clearly that this family is raising their son or daughter towards the day that son or daughter will be baptized as a young adult.

### **John the Baptist said,**

*“And there comes after me one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)*

### **What is meant by that phrase?**

There is no question that John the Baptist was expecting that Jesus Christ would be the judge who would bring severe judgment on evildoers. And there is also no question that John the Baptist was disappointed, because Jesus did not exercise the kind of judgment that he expected. In Luke’s gospel John the Baptist gives his great speech of his expectation as to what the ministry of Jesus will look like. He says,

*“His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear the threshing floor, and the wheat he will put in the granary, and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Luke 3:17 & John 3:12)*

And then Jesus Christ shows up on the scene and he disappoints John the Baptist by saying to John, *“Baptize me.”* And John says, *“No, I’m not supposed to baptize you.”* And Jesus says again, *“Baptize me.” (Matthew 3:13-15)*

So that’s the first disappointment. Then Jesus goes to Galilee and seems to almost isolate himself in a ministry in the hill country and in the meantime he doesn’t take his winnowing fork and clear the threshing floor and burn the chaff in unquenchable fire. So John the Baptist sends his own disciples to Galilee and says,

*“Are you the Messiah? Or shall we look for someone else?” (Matthew 11:2)*

So he was definitely disappointed in that Jesus did not fulfill the expectations the John had spoken so clearly.

### **John wore the “doubt cap.”**

Yes, Jesus Christ does fulfill the judgment passage, but he fulfills it by taking the judgment on himself. And no one expected that. That’s beyond comprehension. But the judgment texts of the

Old Testament and the New Testament would be fulfilled by the Son of God actually disarming the power of evil and the power of death and sin, as he takes these upon himself.

**Changing the subject, lets discuss a few other questions that many people have.**

## **Angels**

**Where does the idea of angels as creatures with wings come from?**

The idea of angels having wings comes out of medieval art for sure. I don't think it came out of the early church, but we don't know. They may have featured angels with wings, because the Cherubim and the Seraphim of Isaiah 6 were messengers and they were described with wings.

**I hear that some people are of the opinion that after death people turn into angels and return to help their relatives.**

No, angels are not people who have died. That is not Biblically taught. Angels are a part of the creative order that God has created to minister to us. They are messengers from God. We are people and we stay people. When we die, God fulfills us as people. He doesn't turn us into cherubim or angels.

**Since God made angels as messengers, what about the Christian belief of communicating with God and getting God's word through angels?**

The word "Angel" means "messenger." I believe there are many mysteries in the way God chooses to comfort us and to assure us, and I tend to say we don't really understand all the ways God uses to comfort or assure human beings. He may do it with a person who plays a role in my life, and afterward, a mystery may be attached to it too, in which I can say that God sent a messenger to assure and encourage me.

The Protestant view is that those messengers will never contradict scripture. *They are going to bear witness to the scriptures but never give doctrine beyond scripture.* Here's the way it works. *The Bible is the primary truth reference point.*

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Here's an example from our tradition of ordination of Pastors. A person may claim that he or she has had a message from God but others need to agree before he or she can actually preach. That's our Doctrine of Ordination. We hear his or her statement of faith and see if this is true to the confessions and to the Biblical witness, and then we make the judgment as to whether he or she is ready to preach in the church. In other words, a person can't preach at UPC unless the body of Christ agrees (ordination).

Like practicing medicine a person can't suddenly decide that he or she is a doctor. Colleagues have to agree and designated requirements must be met. That's the same principle we are using in ordination.

### **A number of requirements must be met.**

Back to the topic of angels as messengers, I know of an angel experience of **Otto Piper**, who was Professor of New Testament at Princeton. As a young scholar in Bonn he was forced to leave Germany in the late 1930's by the Nazis. He went to England. He arrived in London at the train station and a young man came up to him and said, "*You're Otto Piper, aren't you?*" He said, "*yes,*" and the person said, "*Follow me,*" so he went with this young man who took him to a Church of England Guest House, and he said, "*You come here*" and Otto Piper entered the guesthouse. He said, "*My name is Otto Piper from Germany,*" and he was welcomed, "*Yes you may stay at this guest house.*" Piper said, "*By the way, thank you for sending your guide to meet me at the train,*" and they said, "*We didn't send anybody to meet that train.*" I heard Otto Piper himself tell this story, and he felt that God had sent an Angel, as no one else knew he was coming and they hadn't sent anyone to meet his train. So he felt that an angel had come to help him. And who is to say? I don't know. I think there are people who have experiences in their lives where they have experienced a messenger of encouragement, and, as you know, Doctor, there are probably people that have been in hospital beds who have even seen someone they thought was helping them and then nobody turned out to be there.

**It's true. Several people said they saw angels around me when I was in my thirty-two day coma, so I came to be more open-minded to the concept of angels.**

Yes, and we do have references in the Bible to angels. ***“Some have entertained angels unaware” (Hebrews 13:2)***– not aware that they had a messenger that was actually from God. I visited a dying man who said to me, *“I believe, Reverend Palmer, that I just saw someone who knew me standing at the foot of my bed.”* Now maybe he was getting delusional towards the end of his life- who am I to say? Later I said to the nurse, *“Was a nurse in here or did one of the orderlies come in just now?”* She said, *“No there are no orderlies on duty now. There’s nobody here, just us nurses (women).”* The patient said, *“It was a young man that was here, who stood by my bed.”* It was late at night, around midnight. That man really believed this was a messenger that God had sent to comfort him.

I am not going to say to this man, *“It was all your imagination.”* I would rather say, ***“One wonders,”*** because you just don’t know. God can do what He wants to do.

**There is a curiosity about the so-called “fallen angel,” Satan. What are your views on Satan?**

The New Testament use the words, devil, accuser, evil one, and tempter to describe Satan. The Bible indicates Satan is “a fallen angel.”

All we do know is that the devil has been defeated. *Evil has no right to mortgage our lives because Jesus Christ has won the victory. We should not live in terror of Satan or demonic marauders. We should not give them power they don’t have.*

**It’s confusing to a lot of people. I conducted an Internet search and it cites a number of Biblical and non-Biblical definitions of Satan – the fallen angel.**

## **Funerals & Memorials**

**Miracles of healing don’t ways occur and when there is a death there is generally a funeral. Do you believe funerals should be a time of celebration as well as mourning?**

Both grief for real loss and gratefulness should be present in the worship service of remembrances. At the center of Requiem is the affirmation of Christ’s presence and victory

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over death, as we remember and grieve the loss of someone who has died.

**What about memorial services such as the one for Steven Rintamaki? This book is dedicated to Steven who died as a Corporal in the Marine Corp serving in Iraq.**

I see a memorial service as a witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and as a worship service in memory of that person who we have lost to death. What we do in a Memorial Service should always be a mixture of grieving the real loss of the person along with gratefulness for their life and our hope of eternal life in Christ. We are thankful for their life and we are committing their body to the earth and their life into God's hands with the sure hope of resurrection. We are claiming the love of Christ and his faithfulness for that person, and for us, the living. Every death experienced in the church and in the family has a unique aspect.

There's a different kind of grief for a young person who dies, when their life has been cut too short. Each service of worship should be appropriate for the unique realities of that person.

Steven's service had a whole different reality about it than a service for a man 90 years old, where a life has been fulfilled within the years of life on this earth and he has fulfilled so many of his goals. Steve's life was cut short. He was at a point where he was beginning to soar, so there was a sense of tragedy in that memorial service that isn't there if the person has had a full life. And yet the same gospel and the same good news of God's love and God's faithfulness is claimed in both services, and we are grateful for that.

## **Suicide**

**What about suicide?**

For suicide there is a very harsh difference we must make clear, that what has happened here, just like in a murder, is against the will of God. We still claim God's grace but I would never say in a service that this person had coped the best way they could cope. They did not have to take their life. It is not God's will for us to harm ourselves or take our lives. But as Christians who trust in Christ's grace we are going to claim the outer boundaries of God's love.

The beauty of Christian worship is that every worship is relevant to every unique reality. We just have to be careful and wise in making that connection.

## **Heaven & Life After Death**

**Some religions believe in reincarnation instead of heaven. The comedian, Steve Allen, used humor to evade the question,**

*“What do you think of Shirley McLaine’s position on reincarnation?” After a poignant pause, he replied, “I don’t know, but I’ve known her a long time – ever since she was a Cocker Spaniel.”*

**This has been called “humor aikido,” using humor to step aside from questions you’d rather not answer.**

**What do you feel about heaven and “life after death?”**

Heaven is the creation not now knowable us. One wonders at God’s greatness, leaving full understanding for us to know at a later time.

**Most people have a corporal view of heaven, in which you are physically there in the body and your body is attached to your soul and spirit. Would you comment on that? You have said, jestingly, that everyone sees himself in heaven at age 30, but what happens when a child dies at age 2? Are they a child forever? Or do they “grow up” in heaven?**

I respect the language of the Apostle Paul, that we are going to be fulfilled in heaven and that there is a completion, and frankly it’s a mystery. We don’t know. What of our uniqueness is going to be preserved as part of our identity? I like the fulfillment model. Think of Aristotle when he said, *“What is this acorn – is it an acorn or an oak tree?”* Really it is both. The acorn is like the little infant, both the acorn and the infant are destined to mature into unique beings. The infant may become an athlete, a physician, a business person, or whatever is his or her fulfillment. It is encouraging for us to think of heaven as a fulfillment.

**These questions baffle me. What if you are happily married and your first wife dies, you remarry another woman and both are in heaven, whom will you be with in heaven?**

Our Lord said that there isn't marriage in heaven. But there is fulfillment in heaven, so that means that there are relationships with people in your life, the ones you love, and I guess God has to shepherd that without breaking his rules. He would have to shepherd that. Just look at all the people in our lives, just that alone, with six degrees of separation, there's going to be a multitude of people who are connected to each of us.

**Another question that I asked Dale Turner was, “*Are there dogs in heaven?*” Dale's answer was, “*I don't know, but I bet they will be waiting with their tails wagging at the Pearly Gates when you arrive!*”**

Why not? There is a fulfillment of the created order. They are a part of what we treasure.

**It's hard to know where to draw the line with pets, including cats and mice, rabbits and birds, aquarium fish, horses and farm animals etc. What do you think, Earl?**

One wonders!

**So if you had six dogs during your life, and you had six with you, would you have a “dog pack?”**

You'd have quite a crowd. I have to trust again, the Judge of all the earth to do rightly and to shepherd that fulfillment. Paul says that the whole creative order is standing on tiptoes waiting for the sons and daughters of God (referring to us) to come into view. In other words, we are part of the fulfillment and He causes the whole creative order to stand on tiptoes. That's amazing – the lions, the tigers, the bears, the cuddly little dogs and kitty-cats and all these animals that God caused to happen. (*Romans 8*)

And it was interesting that when Job meets God, as described in the book of Job, what does God do but give him a tour of the whole created order! On this grand tour of all of the created order, God included the whales. (Recall that Jonah had been swallowed by one.) He makes jokes about them and says they are very hard to catch.

## **What does the Bible mean when it speaks of us being created in the image of God?**

Image means imprint, which is the sense of the words in the Genesis description. We have a yearning for God Himself. We yearn for fulfillment. *“My heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee, Lord.”* (St. Augustine)

There is an imprint within us that yearns for God. We were meant to live from the center, not at the center.

We yearn for fellowship with God. He made us for Himself, for fellowship with Him, and for fellowship with each other. He gave us that ability to yearn for God. The Bible, the way it is written and intended to be read, leads us to God.

## **Is Heaven A Place & What’s The Way?**

**Since Christians believe in heaven, how do you know that the only way to Heaven is through Christianity?**

Heaven is reached through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who decides our destiny. The good news is knowing Jesus Christ as the one who is the Lord of grace. That places the focus away from “Christianity” as religion and towards a relationship with Jesus.

**Do you believe Heaven is a place?**

The book of Revelation in the New Testament tells of a New Jerusalem (Heaven) that sounds like a place, and yet it is beyond place – it is fulfillment. I don’t think it’s helpful to try to figure out measurements or geography of Heaven. I think it’s better to see that there is a fulfillment that God has in store for us. All that God created by his loving redemption is fulfilled and that is the Biblical portrait of Paradise.

## **Mystery of Fulfillment**

What does this mean?

*“In my Father’s home are many dwelling places.”* (John 14:2)

I’ve always interpreted that to mean that our Lord is saying that in heaven in our final fulfillment, there is room for all of his disciples.

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**It's hard to view heaven geographically as having earth-like dimensions. If that were the case, it seems that it would fill up as time goes on. In a spiritual view of heaven, rather than an incarnate bodily view of heaven, someone's spirit takes no space and many of the questions about heaven can be answered in that model.**

The whole question is, "What does it mean that God fulfills us?" Because we know that our bodies are valued too, our concreteness is valued as a part of fulfillment. And what does he mean by that? I find it most helpful to leave it as a mystery and leave how we are going to handle these realities of size and place in God's hands.

### **Abortion**

**What do you think about abortion?**

I do not like abortion at all. I think it's always a bad choice. I wrote about it in my book *"Ten Commandments and New Testament Faith,"* published as *"Old Law - New Life"* by Abingdon Press in Nashville, a Methodist Publishing House. This book published in 1984 summarizes my feelings about abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and war. And I stand by that book.

I think that abortion should always be a very hard choice but not an impossible choice. I don't think it should be impossible for us to make. I lived for six years in a non-abortion country and there it is totally illegal to have abortions. I do not think that's right. There are times when abortion is a lesser of two bad choices. It's just like war; war is a bad choice, but in certain historical situations it may be a lesser of bad choices. But the thing that I don't like is where abortion is treated as only a woman's choice. There is a man involved in it, just as is a woman, and there is a separate life of a fetus. The "not-yet born" human is not an extension of a woman's body. It's not like an appendix or like any part of the body. It has it's own DNA, and therefore, it seems to me that abortion is extremely hard to justify. But you have to say that it can be done when the mother is in danger.

**It seems to me that there can be extenuating circumstances in addition to immediate danger to the mother. Pregnancy induced by rape may raise the argument in favor of termination of a**

**forced, unwanted pregnancy that could totally interrupt that woman's future.**

**Unfortunately, there is no clear line on the continuum of growth of a fetus where abortion is safest, although three months gestation is commonly used as a dividing line. This is arbitrary and leads to legitimate arguments on either side of this line. You are aware that there is a "morning after" pill that was reviewed by the FDA and initially rejected in spite of total agreement that the pill was safe and effective. The "Pill" is now available in certain states with a number of restrictions. Some people are opposed to this pill on religious grounds, feeling that "life is holy" and that pregnancy exists as soon as fertilization occurs. Others feel that the government has no right to make these moral decisions or to enter the world of medicine and science on this topic. In my view, contraception prevents unwanted children in a world becoming overpopulated, and in a society where women and men are not always prepared, or willing, to take on the responsibilities of a newborn child.**

**Does this take away the early embryo from the possibility of heaven?**

**Embryos are in God's hands, whether they are in our hands or not. If we handle life carelessly, it doesn't mean God handles life carelessly. I leave that in his hands.**

**That's why I feel that abortion always has to be a hard decision. It never should be seen as a good decision. I do believe that the life that is with us, the mother who is with us, must be given more weight than the life that is not yet with us. In the dreadful crisis moment when a mother's life is endangered I would not want abortion to be illegal. I think there are times when abortion, which is a bad choice, is the lesser of bad choices. Abortion should be legal but not an easy decision.**

**Premarital celibacy was preached and enforced by the church, and now we look sideways at this and people are not expected to be celibate until and unless they are married. They should just**

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**be responsible in their sexual behavior. What do you think about this?**

I think the ideal is to remain celibate. Being sexually active as a young person doesn't make for a happier marriage when that young man or woman finally finds a life partner. I believe that young couples that stay virgin until they marry are happier, and so I always encourage couples to remain celibate. I have married many couples, some were sexually active before marriage and many were not. I have yet to marry a couple that was glad they were sexually active before marriage. I have yet to marry a couple who said it helped them have a greater and more romantic sexual experience in marriage. In fact, I have known several couples who were sexually active, fell in love with each other, set a date and then were chaste and did not want to be sexually active until after marriage. They wanted to save intercourse for their married life together.

The Apostle Paul is wise in the way he gives advice. He says in I Corinthians 7 to the young couples,

*“If your desires are strong, and you are afraid that you are acting improperly towards your betrothed, then get married.”*

He is facing the fact that young couples, when they fall in love, have an extreme sexual attraction. You should never get married unless you have strong desires. So Paul says, if your desires are strong, and you are afraid that you are acting improperly, and beginning to take advantage of another person, or are maybe very tempted, then he urges you to get married and set your date earlier.

You need to have strong sexual attraction for marriage and that's very important.

**I think your experiences as a Christian preacher with young people regarding premarital sexual experience may be different than mine as a practicing physician. As a physician, a number of people have said they appreciated sexual intimacy in marriage much more because of premarital experience. Also, in Biblical times, I understand it was common to be married at around age 14, whereas in our times, it is not uncommon for some people to remain unmarried until 30 or more. A marriage certificate should not be viewed “as a license for sex.” With**

**birth control readily available, sexual intimacy can be experienced without unplanned pregnancy.**

The data that have been gathered by researchers have not supported what you discovered from people who said that to you. The data I am aware of has shown that couples who were highly sexually active before marriage did not fair better in marriage than those who weren't.

What if the sexual union is seen as the Bible sees it – as “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” – we became united physically as a whole person and that is a romantic view of sexual intercourse. I think there is a natural build up of desire and I think that is good and that's healthy. I think it's best if couples save sexual union for marriage – if they can. I advise it.

**Sex shouldn't be too casual. There's a witty joke that makes the point.**

*The man says to the woman, “Tell me, am I the first man you've made love to?” She replies, “You could be ... your face looks familiar.”*

She's a post-modernist for sure.

**Marriages based largely on sexual attraction may find it difficult to stay together if there are no other reasons for bonding.**

**Regarding sexual intercourse outside of marriage, what are we to tell people who are divorced or separated from their partner by death?**

**Paul says that it is best for widows to remain single and serve the Lord, but if they cannot be celibate, for them to marry. (Notice the old tradition of setting one value for women and leaving it vague for men!)**

## **Time Questions & Purgatory/Limbo**

**What about purgatory? As I understand it, purgatory is viewed as a place where the spirit goes after the death of the body and is there until judged by Jesus in terms of going to heaven or hell. Is that even close? Help!**

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It's interesting because recently the Roman Catholic Church decided to discontinue the teaching of the concept of limbo because it is a non-Biblical theory that was developed by the medieval church.

Purgatory is a church teaching that is endeavoring to answer a puzzle. I maintain that you shouldn't try to answer the puzzle. The puzzle is what happens and what is the timing after we die and before the fulfillment of history? When you look at time the way we look at time, chronologically, where you span it in terms of days, weeks, months and years, you have a problem as to what happens in term of chronological time when we die. But notice, that is only a problem if we impose our reckoning of time on God. But what if God doesn't need to be dependent on our measuring of time? What if there are several kinds of time that can all co-exist. Even modern physics is hypothesizing different models of space and time.

**Yes, in more than three dimensions.**

Maybe there are other ways of understanding time. C. S. Lewis was working with that in *Chronicles of Narnia*. Have you seen the movie, "*The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe?*"

**Yes.**

That movie is just marvelous. When the English children enter Narnia through the wardrobe, the time spent in Narnia does not use up time in England. Lewis is working with two whole sets of time such that there can be a time going on here and a time going on there and they can be totally separate. Lewis was very intrigued with that.

*"Lucy had had no time to have gone anywhere, even if there was such a place. She came running after us the very moment we were out of the room. It was less than a minute, and she pretended to have been away for hours."*

*"If I say she had got into another world I should not be at all surprised to find that the other world had a separate time of its*

*own, so that however long you stayed there  
it would never take up any of our time”.*

*C.S. Lewis, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe  
The Chronicles of Narnia” Copyright 1950 & 1978*

Actually, there are two kinds of time that are at work in the Bible. One would be the chronological time we know best and measure. The other would be kyros time, or time that may not be captive to chronological measurements. That’s one way to understand the epic approach to the six days of creation. Are day one to day six intended as earth-time days? Are they twenty-four hour days? Is Moses talking about six days as we time them? Is Moses trying to suggest that the whole creative order comes about in six chronological earth days? I do not think that chronological measurement lies at the core of the Genesis Creation saga – an affirmation of the meaning of creation. But right there you get the hint that there is a whole different way of understanding time that Moses has written for us in Genesis.

You can see where the Catholic Church, in trying to solve the riddle, and decided to develop the doctrine of purgatory to handle the time after death before you are judged and go to Heaven or Hell. We don’t have to understand the full meaning of kyros time. Leave it in God’s hands. I quote Lewis is:

*“You might as well leave it in God’s hands because it’s there whether you leave it there or not.”* Consider Paul’s statement, *“When I die I’m going to be with the Lord.” (Romans 14:8)* God will answer all the “time” questions.

**Are you happy with the nation of Adam and Eve being the same as portrayed in Genesis? Is this an allegory-colored saga?**

Exactly, and the proof of it is Moses himself. He at first glance portrays Adam and Eve as the only two human beings to start the whole human race. Then they have two sons, and suddenly one of them finds a wife. Where does the wife come from? Moses hasn’t provided a story for her, which shows that he is not even thinking that way. He knows that somebody is going to raise his hand and say, “Hey, just a second Moses, you haven’t provided for a wife

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yet.” And what does he do? Does Cain marry his sister? That would be incest and that’s against God’s will. No, Moses isn’t writing that kind of document. Moses is writing a saga account. We are wise to accept what he writes as he writes it. We are given a clue at the outset, when He doesn’t provide the creation of two girls for Cain and Able, and yet, there they are.

**Are you familiar with the Flatland book? Their concept is one that appeals to me. These creatures live in two dimensions on a piece of paper and from outer space comes a hand. First, the little finger strikes the paper and a creature living there says, “*Hey this circular thing just came here and landed in our area.*” And they chase and walk around it. Then the next finger comes down and they say, “*There’s another one.*” The first finger goes up and they say, “*There went the first one. It’s gone someplace else. It’s gone.*” Actually, it isn’t gone; it’s just in another dimension. This continues for the period of four fingers coming down into this Flatland space. The fingers are perceived as not existing before or after their time on Flatland. They are just in another dimension.**

### **Bible Taken Literally**

**Do you take all of the Bible literally?**

When people ask me if I take the Bible literally, I reply,  
*“Yes, I do.”*

I want to take it like a literary interpreter would understand it as a document. I want to take it as it is written and Moses gives us clues early on, when he writes the way he is writing – in a broad, sweeping philosophical form. Moses speaks to a theological understanding of the “Why?” and the “What?” of creation. But don’t press Him on the “How.” As we should try to figure that out for ourselves, that is where science is born. One scientist friend of mine put it this way: *“God made it. Let’s find out how!”*

**One of your strengths is the way you focus on the meaning of words in various languages, and how they can have different meanings in the context in which they are used.**

**I liked your interpretation of the injunction to rest on the seventh day of each week: ‘Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.’ You keep it holy but you are working.**

The key is keeping a rhythm such that,  
*“Six days thou shalt labor and one day thou shalt rest.”*

It’s a rhythmic view of life, and that’s the meaning of the 4th Commandment, to live our week remembering God’s will for seven days. The whole of our life should follow a rhythm.

**That makes a lot of sense to me, and again it’s not taking the Bible exactly literally.**

My goal is to take it as it was intended by the writer. As Paul said, **“Read the text in terms of it’s goal.”** What is the goal – the intent? What is the writer after? Listen to what he says and then ask, **“What does he mean?”**

**If there were no ambiguity, there couldn’t be such a thing as a Bible Study. All we would have to discuss would really be to say, “okay.”**

That’s right.

**It’s the fact that we can use an interpretation of the Greek.**

The reason we have Bible studies is because there may be differences in the meaning of the words. It’s not a propaganda document that has only one authorized interpretation.

## **The Meaning of Death**

**Death is something that, as a physician and as a human being, I am interested in. I like concepts of death being taken seriously, humorously and heroically. If you are a Christian, why are you not happy that the person who has died has gone on to Paradise? It should be a time of joy and celebration. It seems to me that some churches celebrate more that way, with more “halleluiahs” and songs of celebration.**

I was recently really struck with this. While watching television I observed a funeral processions being conducted in New Orleans, after the devastation from hurricane Katrina. Historically, black funeral processions have been a big part of New Orleans Jazz. They

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were carrying on that tradition, escorting the casket out to burial. What I didn't realize is that the opening music is very dirge-like, very solemn, slow, mournful, and a big part of the source of the blues – totally mournful tunes. And then at a certain point in the parade, the music switches to exuberant jazz with the trumpets and the saxophones playing incredible New Orleans jazz. The procession starts with a sense of the tragedy of the death being observed with sadness and grieving and then it breaks into joy. That is very Christian and it shows the deep reservoir of Christian faith in those believers.

**The perception is often that the person died too young and could have done more and that it is their loss. No, it's not their loss, it's our loss and we are the ones grieving for ourselves.**

And we should grieve. There is a grieving because people are irreplaceable. There is nobody who can take the place of someone. Each person is an original.

**I heard one gentleman say, “I hope my wife dies before I do, because she would be so lost without me if I should die first.” Did I quote Oscar Wilde to you? He was not known for his Christian perspective, but he did say something that was funny. On his death bed he looked up and said, “This wallpaper is terrible. One of us has got to go!” He had a sense of humor to the end.**

That's good.

## **Miracles**

**What do you think of Bernie Siegal's book, “Love, Medicine and Miracles”? What sort of miracles have you experienced in your life?**

I know of that book, but haven't read it.

**I think you would like Siegel's book and be impressed by the stories of miracles that have happened to some of his patients. Miracles are also described in my book, “Beyond Medicine.”**

***One definition of a miracle is “an unpredictable outcome, unexplained by evidence-based medicine.” If a miracle contradicts***

our understanding of natural laws, we are challenged to examine and extend these laws – not to reject the miracle. The same may well be true in the case of Jesus’ miracles, which we are challenged to accept without clear explanation of how they occurred. *Each miracle tells a story and we learn and are motivated more from stories than from statistics.*

In my own case history with ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome), after falling out of a ski lift, a number of “miracles” were associated with my survival. It “just happened” that a physician and ski patrolman were skiing by the exact place where I fell and rendered life-saving care. They were able to make arrangements for a helicopter transfer to Washoe Medical Center. I was fortunate to have Bob Watson as my attending physician. At least twice during my 32 day Intensive Care stay I was deemed “hopeless” but Dr. Watson and my family refused to “pull the plug.” Prayers from all over the world and cards expressing love continued and I became known as “the miracle man” with my survival.

I came to realize the power of love and prayer as elements of healing. My book, “*Beyond Medicine*,” includes nineteen other individuals, many of whom had experienced miracles in the course of ARDS and other serious medical problems.

In the Bible the word for Jesus’ miracles is ‘signs.’ I like that word ‘sign.’ I like that because a sign has a meaning in itself, yet it points beyond itself. It points to a greater reality. In a way that is what the miracles of Jesus are like. They are important for what they are, but they point beyond to his love and his authority as God.

**What do you think of modern day miracles? We associate miracles with Jesus, but do we associate miracles happening for people that we pray for in church when they are in a hopeless situation? Then there is a reversal that is beyond medical explanation, and they survive and that is called a miracle.**

Yes, and also I’d call it a miracle in a certain special way. For example, when a child goes to the hospital and maybe a few years ago there was just no way that child’s life could be saved and now, because of what has happened in today’s medicine, here is a life

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that is saved. It's like a miracle in a way. It was what we didn't expect. We never would have expected it twenty years before, but now it happened, and yet we can explain it. We know how it happened and we look at it and we call it an amazing gift and an amazing wonder.

Now it is true that in the New Testament, when we think of miracles, we think of an intervention. We think of God intervening in our favor by His decision. It takes us by surprise, and it cannot be explained apart from the fact that God intervened. And I believe that can happen. There can be an intervention. God can intervene. He ordinarily uses the stewardship of people around someone who is in great need and that someone around will reach out and help.

Here's an actual example that comes to my mind. Here is a man who is 22 years old, a specimen of health, 6' 5", who is riding his bicycle on a deserted road on Vashon Island. He falls, hits his head on the pavement, cracks his head, and somebody comes by who happens to have a cell phone, sees this young man lying on the street and realizes how badly he is injured. This person calls 911, describes to the police where he is, and a helicopter is there within an hour and he is at Harborview Hospital within another hour, and his life is saved.

He is now teaching in our Sunday School! He is virtually completely recovered, with a few things to cope with. Now, is that a miracle? In a way it IS a miracle, that a stranger showed up, with his cell phone with him, drove down that road and saw a young man lying on the street. The timing was absolutely just in time, and if I were his parents, I would thank God for that intervention. I would thank God that it was a miracle, and yet, in another sense, it wasn't a miracle because it was explainable. Harborview Hospital surgeons played their role, the nurses played their role, and the stranger played his role in this miracle.

I love how Phil Smart calls Children's Hospital "the miracle house." I like that. It is a new way of seeing miracles, in the coming together of a team that helps and heals. And yet, it is not a miracle in that classic sense that there was an intervention without any human role. There are hardly any of those. But God can rescue us any way he chooses.

## **What do you feel about miracles and healing?**

Jesus made it clear when He did heal us and that He wants us to fight for health and work for it. In the healing incident recorded by John in John 9, Jesus shows us that sickness is not a curse from God or from people. God has used men and women to begin hospitals around the world to care for those who are ill. This is His plan. He told us to have dominion over the earth and sea, and instructed us to make use of our stewardship to help each other with our knowledge.

## **Prayer**

**If prayer induces miracles through God, I would like to know more about this concept. Could prayer be a force all of its own, like light, gravity and microwaves? I feel that my survival from my ski lift fall and ARDS was due to a lot of prayer. Could prayer be one of the forces God has provided for us, as humans, to use for healing?**

I agree with that. There are many mysteries involved, and why would God invite us to pray and why would prayer be such a huge factor in the New Testament and the Old Testament, where we are invited to make our requests known to God? *The word for prayer in Hebrew is 'palah,' which means to "think with God"*. So it is that prayer has an intellectual component. Prayer also means "asking for help". There is also praise and worship in prayer. There is meditation in prayer. All of those ingredients are part of the prayer vocabulary in the Bible.

**Maybe you can help me with one aspect of prayer that continues to upset me. I am upset that so much of prayer is praising God, as if God has an ego and needs to be praised. I don't know why we don't praise humans that do the will of God, and not praise God so much. So much of prayer is repeating "praise God" as if God is not going to like us if we don't say good things about Him. However, I believe that the positive attitude toward the goodness of God is a positive force for us to do good.**

Yes, I think we have to be clear about the meaning of praise. God is not fragile and he is not easily offended. I think that the reason for praise is that it is our recognition of God's goodness and

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His faithfulness. That's what praise is. *The word for praise is 'hallel' in Hebrew, like Halleluiah (praise the Lord).* In fact, all praise songs are called the hallel songs. Also hallel in Hebrew means to shout, so it is a sign of exuberance. That's what I think praise is – it's that experience when it dawns on me that I have noticed God's goodness, and I give praise. I think that's what it is. I don't think that it is to satisfy God's ego, it's just the shout that comes up from us because of gratitude.

**I just keep getting this feeling from the churches I've been in, that it's as if God needs to be cajoled or "kissed up to."**

He doesn't have to be flattered. It's OUR exuberance that should mark genuine praise.

**I would be happier if prayers were focused on our responsibility to God. This would help me to be the sort of person that God wants me to be, and that I want to be.**

That describes intercession and the prayers of confession that confess my needs.

**Does God make a choice when we offer prayers of intercession?**

There again, we must do no harm to our freedom and we must attempt to do no harm to God's freedom. We can never say that God is captive to any set of expectations and that's what makes prayers of intercession very dynamic and real. We have freedom and God has freedom too, and He may give surprising answers to our intercessory prayers.

**We don't see things like the raising of Lazarus after four days.**

No we don't. It looks like it was a very special occasion. C.S. Lewis made a humorous reflection about that. He said that Lazarus got a bad deal. He had to die twice and it's no fun to die. After going through one dying experience, then Jesus raised him, and he, later on, did die again, so be careful what we ask for.

**In addition to intercessory prayers, when we ask for some outcome, there are also prayers of argument, where we argue with God, sometimes making demands.**

These are sometimes called 'complaint prayers.' Job prayed,  
"Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might lay  
my case before Him." (Job 23:3,4)

This is a prayer of complaint.

Probably the greatest of all complaint prayers is Psalm 22,  
"My God, my God, why has though forsaken me?" (Psalms  
22:1, also Mark 15:34 & Matthew 27:46)

These were the words Jesus prayed as he was dying on the cross for  
our sins. It is interesting, that this prayer of complaint also uses a  
shout word, and says,

*"Why are you so far from my groaning (King James)."*

Actually the word in Hebrew is "my roaring" – Jesus is saying,  
"I'm shouting for help and you are not acting." In praise one shouts  
for joy and in complaint one shouts for help. In both cases, there is  
shouting – one as praise and the other as a roar of disappointment.  
Both are prayer and both are Biblical.

## Evangelism

**By evangelism we don't mean a militant or crusading zeal that  
does not respect the autonomy of others. We do include Bible  
study, church attendance and living in such a way that others  
are attracted to learning more about Jesus Christ. The slogan  
at UPC, "Every member a minister" indicates that each  
church member, not just the pastoral staff, is given this  
opportunity.**

**What do you feel about evangelism? I think what you've said  
and what I've heard you talk about, is that it's better to be a  
mentor rather than an "enforcer."**

Luther has a great line. He said, "*If you are converted because  
of fear, you will later hate your conversion.*" Add this, "*If you are  
converted because of manipulation, you will later hate your  
conversion.*" So evangelism cannot be manipulation; it can't be  
playing to fear. It is best as a simple sharing, in no way tampering  
with a person's ability to think for himself or herself, because the  
Gospel wants to make sense to our minds.

**Both you and Dale Turner have come to Christianity with a  
mature mind after childhood.**

It is good to come to belief in adult years, but I love it when kids come to know Christ in a way that's genuine, real and age-appropriate. It's beautiful, but then you want them to grow. You don't want their youthful faith to stay at a childrens Sunday School level as they grow older. We want their faith to grow as they grow.

## Story Theology

**All religions have stories to tell. I love the Christian story. One way of answering questions about theology was given to me by Walter Bowman, a Professor of Systematic Theology. I met him at Holden Village, a Lutheran Retreat Center on Lake Chelan in Washington. He gave me the concept of "Story Theology" which says, "We live by the stories we tell." Walter said, "I believe in the Christian story and choose to live by that story, and that's why I am a Christian." This answer is so simple that it is unarguable. We live by the stories we tell, and I choose to live by the Christian story.**

That's a little like Pascal's wager, "*I wager on that story and I'm going to build my world view from that.*" That's a theological center, which I trust.

## Sacrifice

**If you were born somewhere else or in a different era in history, you may have chosen another story. For example, you may have believed in Greek icons or rituals such as slaying of lambs. Where does the tradition of slaying lambs begin in the Old Testament? I'm told that the first reference was God slaying an animal in the Garden of Eden to atone for the sin of Adam and Eve. After that, we are told, Adam and Eve were no longer naked but covered themselves with the hide of the slain animal. Does this relate to references to sheep and lambs associated with idolatry and slaying?**

In Isaiah it is explained that it is the suffering Messiah who becomes the lamb in our behalf.

*"All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)*

Then we have John the Baptist. When he saw Christ, he said,  
*“Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)*

### **Why do you use the reference of the lamb?**

Because of that Isaiah passage which says that the one who will take our place will be like the lamb. Also, *Rev. 5* uses the lamb as the reference to Jesus Christ.

Remember the Jews had acted out the drama of sacrifice of the scapegoat ... the idea of sacrifice of the spotted lamb in which that little animal would take our place to pay for our sins. That’s what happens on the Day of Atonement. And the word “atone” means “to cover,” so the blood of an innocent lamb is sprinkled over the Arc of the Covenant to cover the peoples’ sins. That’s where the old Jewish idea of atonement comes from – someone covers you. But the problem is that the lamb doesn’t know what’s happening, it is a victim used as a scapegoat. But Jesus Christ, when He is called the Lamb of God, knows what He is doing, so He is not like a scapegoat caught in the thicket and killed in our behalf.

Jesus lays his life down

*“No one takes my life from me. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again.” (John 10:13)*

He lays his life down as the lamb, but it is the fulfillment of that ancient drama.

### **Where does man get his brutality for human sacrifice or sacrifice of living creatures. Where does that come from? I don’t really see that as an urge of people doing this today.**

We see human sacrifice in the ancient cultures, except for the Jews. The other cultures around them practiced even child sacrifice, which is called *“molek.”* Molek is always called an abomination in the Bible. That practice was part of the worship of the Baal god. Remember Ahab, who is described in the Old Testament as the worst king in Jewish history because he practiced molek, child sacrifice, which is an abomination to God. The strongest condemnation of any king is of Ahab and Jezebel, his wife, who worshipped Baal.

## **Polytheistic Religions & Idols**

**Can you put on your psychological hat instead of your preacher hat and say where does polytheistic religion come from?**

I don't know. Most ancient gods were fertility gods that were worshiped; the Aztecs also practiced human sacrifice without any influence from the culture of the Middle East in Mesopotamia. These horrible human sacrifice structures were also found in Yucatan of the Mayan Indians. It's a strange thing.

**Polytheistic religion in general is strange to me, and features of Christianity which sound polytheistic surprise me. For example, the statement that,**

*“You shall have no other Gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)*

**implies that there are other gods. I think most people now are monotheistic aren't they?**

Most of the great religions, including Islam, are monotheistic. The ancient people had many gods. The people in those instances projected a meaning on something that it didn't have, which is the meaning of the word “idol.”

**Speaking of idols, the popular “reality TV” show, “The American Idol,” does, indeed, make real life people who sing into “idols” in the competition which progressively eliminates contestants until one survives as “The American Idol.” As a TV show, it is refreshing to see a show that is not based on violence. It is based on musical ability, hard work and popular appeal.**

**Perhaps the meaning of the word “idol” is changing from the worship of a religious object, to a new definition related to entertainment.**

## **Christian Story Variations**

I don't want to play the role of denouncing another person's faith journey. I want to share the Christian story as widely and as clearly as I can and invite others to consider it. I trust that the Holy Spirit, God Himself, will confirm His story. That takes the pressure off of me as a teacher and

evangelist. Then I can have a generous spirit and yet have a strong story.

**The story I grew up with was through Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches and through non-denominational Christian chapels in high school and college. During medical school I started to follow the Quaker story and was active with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Now I am wondering if I can be a "Quaker Presbyterian".**

Oh, yes!

**Good. That's how I'd like to be identified. But I don't like labels in general. I have changed over the years. I broke away from my early Presbyterian and Episcopalian roots because I felt there were too many unexplained inconsistencies and too many words and not enough action. They would say one thing and do another.**

I was baptized in the Episcopal Church too, at St. Mark's Church in Yreka, California. My mother was an Episcopalian her whole life.

**Teaching by stories is what Jesus did, and you teach by stories too. You also have a unique ability to analyze the meaning of words in several language.**

I studied Greek and Hebrew at Princeton. I like words and I like to look at words. I learned a lot about the importance of words from C. S. Lewis.

**One of the Quaker saying is that, "There is that of God in every man." As a senior pastor, what is your opinion of this idea?**

I don't agree with that statement. God is God and man is man. I do agree with the strong emphasis that we have to be attentive to God's spirit, but God remains God and we remain human – yet humans who are beloved by God. I do agree with Blaise Pascal that there is a vast abyss between God and humans that can only be crossed by God himself.

## **Different Churches, Different Stories**

**What do you feel are the major differences between various churches in terms of rituals and beliefs? For instance, I know a number of people who go to community or independent churches. What would your interpretation be of the theology of these churches?**

Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Congregational, Catholic Churches are all in the center of the Western Christian heritage.

Even a non-denominational church may align itself with the great traditions of Christendom. We may differ in the way we emerge with different worship traditions. For example, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Catholics face the Alter. Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists surround the Communion Table, which is a difference in worship and pastoral – lay relationship.

This has the effect that we, in the reform tradition, as we surround the Communion Table, tend to be more fellowship and Word oriented and the pastor is seen more as the teacher. The Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox face the Alter and so the pastor is seen more as a priest who ministers between the people and God, so you have a worship difference. It has a major effect in the way people with these church traditions see the church and their relationship to the pastor differently.

There are also different traditions in the way churches have governed themselves down through the ages. Fellowship that surrounds the Communion Table tends toward elected leadership, not permanent bishops. The churches who face the Alter tend to have hierarchical governance. Independent churches will align themselves either in one direction or another.

**In our area many people go to Westgate Chapel, which is a very powerful church in terms of its emphasis on faith.**

Independent churches that are more fundamentalist in theology will usually have very strong pastoral leadership and they still surround the Communion Table like we do. On the other hand, they tend to treat the pastor more like a bishop as an authoritative figure with more control than in our tradition where we are in a check and balance elected tradition. They don't have bishops, but in some

independent churches, the pastors are so powerful that they are like bishops. The traditions of these churches are all valid but they are all different.

### **The Unitarian tradition is quite different.**

They are more on the left side of the Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed side. They wouldn't call themselves so much "a people of the Word," as we are. Unitarian theology is not Trinitarian in its Christology nor is it a theology self understood as under the Word. As Ralph Waldo Emerson described, they are people of the spirit, feeling how the spirit is moving, not just in the Bible. Emerson said, "Don't be slavish about the Bible, have your own dreams, preach your own dreams." That's very Unitarian ... that's post-modernist to the core. Get your vision from where you are at in your life. It is more of a self-governed ideology, that does not want to be under the text of the Bible, but rather based on one's own thoughts and asking God to give guidance.

Unity is much the same as Unitarian. Jehovah's Witnesses are Unitarian in their theology too. The Mormons have their own heritage that is totally different.

## **Quakers**

**What about the Quakers - the Silent Meeting branch as opposed to the pastoral branch? As you probably know the Quaker movement was a reaction to the formal structure of the Church of England and its requirements of going through many steps of church rituals. George Fox felt that God spoke directly to him with the message, "*There is One, only One, who can speak to your condition and that is Jesus Christ the Lord!*" Quakers quaked with the intensity of their prayer as they met together in silence – without church clergy. They were very intense Christians and played a key role in settling the new country. Their commitment to honesty earned them respect in their business ventures. It has been said, "*Quakers came to do good and, did well!*"**

It seems to be the Quaker movement is Christian. They are very strong in teaching on the Holy Spirit and the fact that the Holy Spirit teaches the people. People at Quaker meetings wait until the Spirit moves them, and sometimes they are very quiet meetings because no

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one was “called” to speak. There is something very valid there. These are people waiting until the Spirit moves them. They are a very strong Christian group. I have friends in the Friends Movement. I have spoken at George Fox College in Portland, Oregon, which is a Friends College. (Quakers are often called the “Religious Society of Friends” and have been known for their work through the American Friends Service Committee.)

**Two Quakers, George Fox and William Penn, had an interesting encounter. William Penn asked George Fox, “How long shall I wear my sword?” and George Fox answered, “Wear it as long as thee can.” In other words, you are going to come to the point religiously where you don’t carry a sword.**

**You and I spoke of the differences of your point of the view and the Quakers who say, “There is that of God in every man.” You felt this statement failed to realize the separation of God and man. As I thought about that, how did the Quakers come to that point of view? I think they came to it out of respect more than trying to diminish God, in that God breathed life into all of us, therefore some of God is in us.**

Yes, that is an example of a truth where the high dignity of man is being expressed in that way. It is theologically inaccurate to ascribe to man that he is God, because man is not God. We are made a little lower than the angels. I think the intent of the Quakers is a positive intent – to show how valuable man/woman is because God is the one who created us and breathed the breath of life into us. A great Rembrandt painting is not itself Rembrandt, and yet the painting has the mark of Rembrandt on it. We all have the mark of God on us. That does not mean that we are God.

## **Pentecostal Churches**

**What about the Pentecostal Churches?**

The Pentecostals are a vital part of the Christian family. We have theological differences with them on practices that surround Pentecostal teachings of ‘second blessing.’

They feel that mysterious ‘tongues’ are a sign of a ‘second blessing.’ I don’t agree with ‘second blessing’ theology, as it makes

a Christian focus upon one's own piety too much. It makes you always ask, "Am I spiritually growing like I should be?" "Do I have the gift of speaking in tongues?" ... "Can I do healings?" It's almost like being fixated on the gifts of God instead of on God Himself.

**One of my patients lent me a book called "Nine O'clock in the Morning" by Dennis J. Bennett. Bennett writes in a very moving style and deals with "speaking in tongues" in a very convincing fashion.**

## Witnesses

**What do you feel about the groups like Jehovah Witnesses?**

The Jehovah Witness church is not a Christian religion. They have a lot of attachments to Christian themes, but they have their own unique beliefs. They don't believe in the Trinitarian faith of Christianity. Their religious system is preoccupied with prophesy/predictions from their own special doctrines.

## Mormon Church

**What are your thoughts on the Mormon religion? It's true that religion affects the way people live. The Mormons have different viewpoints: polygamy is one, but they aren't practicing that, are they?**

No, it's against the law in the United States.

**It made sense in an ancient sense where men went off to war and there were not enough men left at home to be fathers to the children.**

I don't know the reason for the Mormon justification of it. So many Mormons that you meet are really Christians because they really trust in Jesus Christ, but it's in spite of the Book of Mormons, not because of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is an unfortunate book. It's a 19<sup>th</sup> century book that claims to be from God with the Story of Latter Day Saints, and as a reformed Christian, we feel that the Cannon is closed with the books that surround Christ. That's what Cannon means ... the books of the

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early church that surround Christ in the first century. So we reject that there are latter day books that have equal authority with the scriptures. A latter day book like Bonhoeffer's book, Karl Barth's book, an Earl Palmer book might be inspiring and might be a nice book to have, but we never would call it authoritative, so that you could build doctrine from that book. And that's the great difference in the LDS theology. They have a doctrine book on which they build their doctrine, that we feel is not valid.

The sad thing is that it's a movement that has, as a doctrinal base for building a church, this extra biblical document that the rest of Christendom does not share, and cannot check it out, because they maintain that the documents were on golden tablets. Nobody has found the golden tablets – where are they? In the middle of that they obviously have some Christian truth because they sing the hymns of Christian faith and read the Old and New Testaments. Many Mormons believe in Jesus Christ and then they have this additional baggage of the Mormon's special doctrines.

### **Merging Of All Churches**

**Do you think there will be a day when all of the churches come together?**

Well, churches all have cultural heritages and backgrounds and have doctrinal differences. Some of the doctrinal differences are greater and more important than others. I don't think it's a scandal that there are many different groups. In an African Christian Church, you wouldn't expect the building to look like a Christian church in New England. There are cultural differences and yet they are both valid models for a church. I think it's more important to have respect and generosity of spirit toward people of different traditions.

Now when it comes to doctrinal differences, each one of those needs to be weighed for its own sake because you sometimes have different experiences and goals. Each of these should be weighed in it's own setting.

**What did the Presbyterian Church have as roots?**

Presbyterianism comes out of the Reformation through Scotland with our parents in the Latin church. Our aunts and uncles would be

Orthodox because the Orthodox and the Catholics broke apart about 300 A.D. We come out of the western heritage. The two great creeds we hold in common with the eastern Orthodox churches are the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed. This shows that we have more in common in the center than differences at the edge. At the edge we are different in how we govern ourselves and fit into a different culture. We maintain the same center.

**Thanks for clarifying that, Earl. I think it is safe to say that there will always be differences in churches, belief systems and religious practices. In fact, religious diversity where there is tolerance should provide strength to a community. Where there is intolerance such as in Iran, Somalia and other locations around the world where there is civil war, it is tragic to see the negative result of such religious differences.**

## **New Opinions**

**Do you have any areas that you believe differently in now than you did at some point in the past?**

That's always a good question. Basically, I stand by everything I've written. I began writing for publication in 1973. My first book is "*Salvation by Surprise*" a commentary on the book of Romans. That was my earliest writing and I still stand by what I have written. However, hopefully I have refined and improved my precision where maybe there was a lack of precision when I was younger. I hope that my pastoral advice has mellowed, changed and grown. My fundamental theological convictions were focused then on the central importance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They still stay focused on that and on the Bible as a faithful witness that surrounds the living center.

**Theological precepts are probably more stable than medical precepts. There are many things doctors believe differently now than they did in the past. For example, until the late 1940s the American Medical Association believed that cigarette smoking was justified because smoking relieved stress.**

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I was fascinated when I saw a special on President Woodrow Wilson who was diagnosed with hypertension when he was President of Princeton University. The doctor told him he needed rest, so he took a leave of absence from Princeton and went to England. Ignoring the doctor's advice, he walked many miles every day and his hypertension went down from exercise. Now a physician would never tell you to just rest for hypertension.

**Yes, Medical advice on exercise has varied 180 degrees from recommending complete bed rest for three to six weeks following a heart attack to current advice which varies with the condition of the patient to a few days in some cases. The same sort of difference exists for rest versus activity following childbirth.**

### **One Nation Under God**

**I agree with that strongly, and also that in terms of not getting political in religious things, it's okay to say, "*One nation under God.*" It's a tradition to say that. Because some people have a different view of God, that is not ordinarily so important, do you think?**

I tend to be a traditionalist with regard to language. I don't like hymns changed. I think when you have a great poem or a great hymn, I want to keep the hymn as the poet wrote it unless the words are just downright wrong or unable to convey the real intent of the hymn. If a phrase is toxic I don't want to use it. When a phrase is healthy and is traditional, I would rather use the traditional phrase and then interpret it with genuine meaning.

### **Earl's Mentors**

**You called John Mackay the greatest preacher that you ever heard. Do you still feel that same way?**

What I loved about John Mackay, who was President of Princeton Seminary when I was a student there, was that he always developed the text. And he always enabled the text of the Bible to speak. As it became clear, then he, as a preacher, reflected on the text, and then these incredible sparks would fly as this brilliant and

good man would reflect on the text. And I was greatly influenced by his preaching and his influence became a big part of my own goal in preaching.

### **It is your style.**

It is my style. Let the text speak – then I like to reflect on the text.

### **It's a great style. Who have been your mentors in the last ten years?**

I would say preachers that mean a lot in different ways. For example, Bob Munger, who was the Pastor in the Berkeley Church when I was a young man. I liked his wonderful authenticity and his earnestness. He is the one that first shared with me that the Christian faith means putting my focus on the faithfulness of Christ, to discover and trust in the trustworthiness of Christ. I respected the kind of simple and direct way in which he just spoke of the Christian faith. So he was a great influence in my life. As an author, Bob Munger is best known for "*My Heart Christ's Home.*" (See poem dedicated to Bob Munger on page 29.)

Another mentor was my good friend Dale Bruner because of his unique visual approach. And of course Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) has been a great influence on my preaching and teaching. Karl Barth (1886-1968) is my theological hero. I like the way he thinks. Barth, like John Calvin (1509-1564), is extremely clear and I think that's his great gift.

Helmut Thielicke, the German theologian (1908 - 1986), was a brilliant preacher. I especially like his complete clarity of language, and his ability to divide things into equal parts.

Martin Luther (1498-1546) was such an exciting teacher! He developed a text and had this brilliant way of getting to the heart of a text. I have his lectures on Romans and Galatians that are just brilliant.

Billy Graham (1918- ) is another man who has influenced my teachings. There is something about Billy Graham's transparency and his wit, in his own way and his love of life. His centeredness is what I like about Billy Graham. I always enjoy listening to Billy Graham; there is just something about him. To me he is a very winsome person. I'm grateful for him.

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### **How About John Calvin?**

The thing about John Calvin is that he is totally clear. He writes and he thinks like a lawyer and he builds a case and then he defends the case and then he shows the implications of the case. That's the way he thinks. He is probably one of the greatest theologians of all time because of that great ability to be totally clear with language. Karl Barth made this comment about Calvin: "*Calvin didn't much care if you liked him, but he wanted to be sure that you understood him.*"

### **The Calvinists became the Presbyterians, didn't they?**

Yes, through Scotland. The Calvinists in Scotland through John Knox (1514-1572) became the Scottish Presbyterians, the source of modern Presbyterianism.

**I have also gained a lot of respect for St. Paul from your writings and I have come to think that here is a man who is very close to Jesus. It's incredible – Paul laid the foundation for Christianity by carrying the gospel to all people, not just the Jews.**

St. Paul is Ambassador to the world and there is no question that he is the most brilliant of the writers. Paul's grasp of Greek philosophy and Greek thought is absolutely superb. His language is eloquent. Paul is certainly the great intellectual giant of the New Testament.

John is not in the same league as Paul as an intellectual, yet John's gospel is a very wonderful portrayal of the living center. Mark and Matthew also have great portrayals of the living center.

Luke, a physician, provided an orderly account of what transpired, which included the role of John the Baptist ...

*"... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)*

His factual recordings of events laid a foundation of historical events.

## Early Life of Jesus

**What year was Jesus born.**

The birth of Christ is dated at 4 B.C. because Herod the Great died near 4 B.C. We don't know exactly how soon Jesus was born before Herod died. There is no reason to doubt Matthew's reference to Herod the Great because we know the date of Herod's death is documented in Jewish records.

**One of those loose edges for me is the period of Jesus' life that we don't know anything about. Was he an ornery two-year-old and a snotty ten-year-old like many young humans? Was he a "saintly" child? A controversial book by Christopher Moore titled "*Lamb*" (Published in 2002 by HarperCollins) is a fictional story of the activities of Jesus as a growing young man. The book shows Jesus as obedient to the Jewish laws, such as remaining celibate when his other friends were sexually active. Many parts of the novel are humorous and many are quite believably inspiring about Jesus as a young man.**

Those are loose edges. After the twelve-year-old boy visits Jerusalem, we don't see Jesus again until he is thirty years old.

**Did he travel in the East and learn about Eastern religion?**

We don't know – probably not. He probably stayed in Alexandria in his early years and then spent most of his time in Nazareth as a boy. But it's interesting, isn't it? If the New Testament had been written as a pure propaganda document, it would cover all those edges and make sure that nothing was left untold.

**Although we have discussed this before, when was Jesus referred to as "Jesus Christ the Lord?" Is there anything that leads to the use of one set of words or another in naming Jesus?**

"Jesus" is a name (Joshua). "Of Nazareth" indicates where he came from. So it would be common to say "Jesus of Nazareth."

"Christ" is actually the Messiah's title. The minute they start saying "Jesus Christ," then what they are really saying is that Jesus is the Christ and they drop the "is." The name "Christ Jesus" says

## SECTION II – PERSONAL QUESTIONS

that the Messiah is Jesus. All are proper. The title “Lord” is based on a Greek word similar to “Christ the Messiah.” The center is the same, whatever title or name is used.

### **Was it Herod the Great who ordered Jesus to be crucified?**

No, it was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas reigned during Christ’s life.

### **Herod Antipas was the “bad boy.”**

Herod Antipas did not condemn Christ to be crucified. Jesus’ death was ordered by Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod Antipas to do a miracle for him, and Jesus refused to do one. Then they put a purple robe on him and mocked him, but Herod Antipas sent Jesus back to Pilate. Only the Roman Governor had the authority to order a crucifixion.

## **God, Man & War**

**On another topic, of special interest to me and to many others. What do you think Jesus’ views on war would be?**

War is unholy, but there have been wars that were necessary for protection of people. It is always a bad choice but sometimes the right choice.

**What do you think Jesus would do if drafted for the military? What would his choice be between being a soldier and a conscientious objector?**

Jesus would face such a call with an important difference from all others facing the draft. He is able to absorb evil. He is the Redeemer. We are not able to absorb evil. What Jesus is able to do, we cannot do. We have to be careful in saying what He would do. He would absorb the evil. We cannot do that. A police officer, seeing a marauder coming towards him with a weapon, might use lethal force, whereas if Jesus were there, he could absorb the evil as the One Redeemer. Luther made use of the term “just war” to describe the situation where people who care about justice must stop a marauder, and in extreme instances must use force to do so.

**If Jesus, as a man, were here and drafted, can you see him doing what he was ordered to do by the politicians and military commanders?**

On a practical level we must ask, "What is His will for me"? His will may be different for different people. I honestly feel that one young man or woman in a family may serve in the military and another will serve his or her country in other ways. Both could be in the will of God. I am just grateful that there are humane people that go to war, and who hate war. General Schwartkof, in one interview, said he would not want to serve under General Patton because Patton loved war, but he would like to serve under Omar Bradley because he hated war. I would rather have a general who hated war than one who loved it.

It's the same with police officers. I don't want a police officer who loves to use a weapon. I want a police officer who hates to use his weapon but can use it if he has to. That's what we face in a less than ideal world. If there were no marauders we could all take a pacifist position.

Any war is a bad war and that is why the Iraq war is so distressful because it was not the last possible choice that may have been available. It was an early choice when our Congress and Commander in Chief were eager to shut down and restrain Sadam Hussein and that was necessary. It seemed that we had options still open in those early days. Now that we are in that situation we have to do our best to help Iraq become a stable and just country.

**What you say about differences in a family makes sense. We have a proud military tradition in our family and yet I chose to be a pacifist. I believe Jesus would have been a pacifist because he had the power to abolish those who crucified him on the cross and he chose to die for our sins.**

Jesus had a role to play that we cannot play. He did use non-lethal force in chasing the money-changers out of the temple.

**The Quakers were speaking of part of God in others and that you shouldn't kill another person. I asked myself, when I became a Conscientious Objector, "What would Jesus do?" which is a reasonable question to ask. I couldn't imagine Jesus**

## SECTION II – PERSONAL QUESTIONS

**going into the military training to kill people for whatever good cause.**

No, on the other hand, Bonhoeffer and Luther helped me to see that you always have to face the fact that when raw evil is present, you don't always have a good and simple choice. Sometimes you must make the lesser of bad choices.

If a marauder is threatening a family and you are a police officer, you do what you must do to protect the family. I believe police officers should be armed. I believe a police officer may need to use lethal force against a marauder. Sometimes this is the lesser of bad choices.

Sometimes it's the lesser of bad choices to go to war. In World War II Germany was that marauder of the whole world – I feel it was right to go to war. I was grateful that Christian men and women, as well as people of strong pacifist inclinations, were willing to say “No!” to Adolph Hitler, which included saying no militarily to him. They had to do it. It wasn't because it was a good choice. I believe war is never a good choice. It always has to be the lesser of bad choices. And I think that it has to be the last choice. That's what is so distressful about the Iraq crisis. I do not believe that it was the last choice. There were other choices that could have been made before. And I feel that war always has to be the last of the choices. But sometimes you are forced to make it because the marauder is coming toward you.

## **Capital Punishment**

**How do you feel about capital punishment?**

I do not like capital punishment because I think it does some bad things. When a marauder is endangering a family, I believe a police officer may use lethal force if it is necessary. But when the marauder is captured and is now helpless and is in our hands, then I don't think we should take his life because he is now no longer a threat. But I also do not think he should go free to go out and maraud again. My honest feeling about capital punishment is that it is not necessary because we are now dealing with a helpless person, not one who is a real danger to our lives. A prisoner behind bars is not a threat. But I don't think the person should ever be free again. So my conviction is that the violent prisoner, the marauder, should

be imprisoned at hard labor for the rest of his life and denied any celebrity status. He should not be allowed to be interviewed by the press. In other words, I do believe in the old tradition of banishment, but not execution. If we kill him, it dehumanizes us.

And another thing is, we take too much interest in capital punishment. We enjoy it in a perverse way too much and I don't think it's good for our culture to watch a hanging or a lethal injection. It's like going to bullfights and watching a bull being killed. The bull is helpless. A man who is under our control is helpless and when he is helpless, then we should not take his life. But we can keep him away from other human beings for the rest of his life.

**That makes sense. A related question is what do you think about gun control?**

I believe in gun control. I believe that weaponry needs to be a right that should always have appropriate restraints around it. I am not against hunting or fishing, but I am against high-powered rifles that are not hunting rifles. There are hand guns that are violent weapons and I think that society should not make them available. I don't believe there is any purpose for automatic weapons to be out for public use.

**Do you remember Tom Wales, the Prosecuting Attorney? Lynn and I had dinner with Tom and his girlfriend not too long before his tragic death.**

Yes, he was shot as he sat at his computer in his house.

**Would you place any controls on weapon toys for children?**

I think there should be reasonable constraint on weaponry. Kids need to play games.

**I always wondered if kids should be raised with toy guns ... you know ... "bang, bang, bang, you're dead!"**

I know my kids played with guns but not as much as my son's best friend. When he was showing up, he seemed to be ambushing people on the street all the time with his toy guns. But he turned out to be a nice guy. In fact, he turned out to be a gentle man, but as a little kid he was shooting machine guns all the time.

## SECTION II – PERSONAL QUESTIONS

**Earl, in this section on personal questions, we've covered a lot of ground and I pray this will allow others to explore their own spiritual pathway. There is much more we could have covered, but your brief and direct responses to my questions will be appreciated by our readers, as they were my myself.**

**I've included some discussion questions to help our readers individually and in groups to explore some of the questions we dealt with in this section.**

**As Christians, whatever differences we may have with the faith of others, we share the focus on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Whatever way we may visualize God, we can be certain that God is too complex for understanding by mere humans. One of my patients gave me a musty old booklet (without a date, but for sale for ten cents). In this booklet "*The Trinity*" (written by Keith L. Brooks, published by Moody Press) John Wesley is quoted as saying, "*Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man and I will show you a man that can comprehend God.*"**

**The Trinity is a concept more complex than thinking of God being alone. But then, again, I don't really understand worms either.**

## Personal Questions

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*This guide is offered for individual consideration or for small -group discussion. Questions follow the general outline of this fairly extensive dialogue with Earl Palmer. Compare your views with those of Earl. This outline is long enough to take two or more normal sessions for a discussion group. Resolving differences in the group can always resort to Palmer's "One Wonders" or Yarnall's "It Depends." In any case, make any discussion a fun chance to compare ideas and to grow spiritually.*

1. What is your view on the creation vs. evolution debate and different points of view about curricula?
2. Do you have a favorite book in the Old Testament? ... A favorite passage? How about in the New Testament?
3. What does the expression, "Right hand of God" mean to you?
4. Do your views on baptism agree with those of Earl Palmer? How do you differ if you don't agree fully?
5. What is your belief about angels? Have you had any personal experiences with an angel?
6. What is your belief about Satan? Have you had any personal experiences with Satan?
7. What is your opinion about heaven? Is it a physical place where you will reside in a physical body? Do you have Biblical passages to support your view?
8. Do you believe the Adam and Eve story is allegorical or is actual?
9. When you die do you want a casket or a cremation? What are your views on funerals?

## SECTION II – PERSONAL QUESTIONS

10. Do you believe there are dogs in heaven? How about cats?
11. Do you believe in miracles? Do you have any to relate?
12. Do you believe God always responds to our prayers? If not, why not?
13. On evangelism, do you believe it is your responsibility to “convert non-believers” to Christianity?
14. Relative to Story Theology do you believe we live by the stories we tell? What stories do you tell and live by?
15. Do you have any experience with other religions or denominations? What differences do you see as important?
16. What are your beliefs and feelings about the following churches: Jehovah Witness; Pentecostal; Mormon; Quaker?
17. Do you see the Bible as the absolute Word of God about which there should be no controversy? Since there is controversy, how should it be resolved?
18. How are the Old and New Testaments connected? Does God appear the same in each? If not, why not?
19. What is grace ...?  
Forgiveness ...?  
Are they connected ...?
20. What is angular Bible theology? And what are your thoughts about this concept?
21. What is the meaning of “love” in a Biblical sense?
22. What to you is the most important theological question of our day?

Many people hold such intense theological beliefs that they fail to hear the beliefs of others. As an alternative plan for discussion groups it is suggested that the participants follow the items in the index and make it a point to restate the position of others if they are in opposition. For example if there are different opinions on “Intelligent Design” participants holding a strong belief in one direction should be asked to state the arguments in the other direction. Understanding the beliefs of another person does not mean accepting those beliefs. There would be far less serious bad feelings and conflict if each person in an argument stated the position of their opponent. Dale Turner was a master of this technique and Earl Palmer also is a master who can clearly state opposing positions while staying rooted in his own Bible-based convictions.

Remember to listen and try to understand the views of others. Focus on “unity of spirit” in spite of diversity of opinion.

## *Prayer*

### *”Help Us”*

*Oh God, help us ... help us grow closer to you as we discuss issues that have been of concern to mankind for many years. Help us to know thy will as we hear each other. Help us listen to others as we would have others listen to us. Help us to maintain unity of spirit in diversity of opinion. Most of all, we pray that thy will be done.*

*Through Jesus Christ, Amen*

## SECTION III

# EARL PALMER BOOKS



Earl in his Manila days



## **Section III - Earl Palmer Books**

### **Introduction**

*Earl Palmer is not only an inspiring speaker but also is a powerful and prolific writer. Most of his books are based on the New Testament, bringing light and new personal insights to the reader. This section records our dialogues based on nine of his publications. (See Appendix for list of his books.) Each chapter starts with an Index of topics and concludes with a set of questions for discussion or individual consideration. Some of my questions have been answered in his books, but are further discussed with Earl. On occasion, similar topics are discussed and answers may be essentially the same. I decided to include this overlap to give additional emphasis to some important questions and answers.*

*In Section III we also include a discussion of one of Earl's unpublished manuscripts that he asked me to review. It is a fictional murder mystery for which I suggested the name, "Murder in Manila." This is a true "thriller," illustrating Earl's sense of drama and skill with words.*

*We conclude Section III with a dialogue on his latest book, "Trusting God – Christian Faith in a World of Uncertainty," a fitting topic in each of our lives today.*

*My intent in these dialogues throughout this book is to maintain the spirit, style and high energy of this remarkable man, Earl Palmer.*

*The Appendix lists audio-tapes and CDs which give the listener a closeness to Earl's presentations beyond that which can be captured in the written word.*

**Earl Palmer books selected for dialogue in Section III are:**

**Salvation by Surprise**

**The Enormous Exception**

**The Book That John Wrote**

**Integrity**

**I, II & III John and Revelation**

**Laughter in Heaven & Humor of Jesus – (two books)**

**Murder in Manila (fiction, working title, to be published)**

**Trusting God – Christian Faith in a World of Uncertainty**

\* \* \*

## **SALVATION BY SURPRISE**

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## **SALVATION BY SURPRISE**

*Written in 1975, “Salvation by Surprise, A Commentary on the Book of Romans” is one of Earl’s first books. This book presents Earl’s colorful commentary on a letter from Paul to the Romans. I start the discussion with a general question asking if one of his books is his favorite.*

**Of the 20 some books that you have written do you have a favorite? That’s almost like asking if you have a favorite child!**

I have different kinds of favorites. I am still very proud of my very first book, which was *Salvation By Surprise*, a commentary on Romans. There I bit off this huge book and that was my very first book. I guess it always stands in a very special place. I published that in 1975, and Regent College Press reprinted it in 1999. I feel really good about that book.

I also feel good about my book on the Gospel of John. First it was published as *The Intimate Gospel* and then we changed the name to *The Book that John Wrote* and this commentary on John was written in 1978.

One of my last ones that I am proud of is *The Book that James Wrote*, based on the book of James. It’s very earthy and this is one of my latest books. There haven’t been a lot of commentaries written on the Book of James. I have a chapter there on plain talk.

### **Apostles and Disciples**

**I like the way you see the apostles as real people – Barnabas is described as being tall and good looking and Paul as being intelligent and well educated, but not very good looking in contrast to his friend. I understand Barnabas was a “disciple” and Paul was an “apostle.” What is the difference?**

The word apostle means “sent ones” – messengers – so that term is usually assigned to the twelve apostles. Disciple is a broader term for anyone who is a follower. That word means “follower,” and yet the twelve apostles are also called disciples. But all

disciples may not be apostles. Barnabas was sent out with Paul so he is rightly called an apostle.

### **Is it really true that Jesus' first miracle was changing water to wine?**

That's a good question. The book of John, in chapter 2, says,  
*"This is the first of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee."*  
(John 2:11)

What does that text mean? Does it mean it is the first sign he ever did anywhere and he did it in Cana? Or is this the first of a number of signs he did in Cana? I believe that the standard interpretation is that John is saying that it is the first of any of the signs. It wouldn't make sense for him to say that, "It's the first sign in Cana," as if he did all kinds of signs in Cana. John is telling us that the first of the signs that Jesus did was to show his disciples his glory in the water-to-wine miracle. I believe it happened.

### **What was His discussion with his mother about the wine?**

I go along with Raymond Brown in his commentary relating that when Mary came up to Jesus and says,  
*"They have no wine,"*

She is not asking for a miracle. Some say Mary is now interceding with Christ for us, but I think she was scolding him like a Jewish mother would: *"What! You came to this wedding feast with all your friends, and you have not brought any wine?"* He would have been expected to bring a gift, and ordinarily that would have been wine.

### **Do you have a literal interpretation of the water-to-wine event or do you take it allegorically?**

A number of interpreters read the "water-to-wine" narrative as a sign given by the early church. They say that the story of water-to-wine is not really a sign given by Jesus, but rather a sign by "church writers." I don't agree with that. I would rather embrace this miracle as a sign given by Christ. He doesn't need the early church writers to make him interesting. He is interesting by himself. Otherwise, if you go the other way and credit all the miracle stories to the early

## SECTION III – SALVATION BY SURPRISE

church writers (writers so clever that they are creating all these accounts of what Jesus did) – then the irony of it is that the most exciting parts of the New Testament belong to the writers and Jesus himself is left with only a few sayings.

I think Jesus was able to startle his disciples when he wanted to, and walking on the water in the middle of the night during a storm startled them for sure. I think he is able to turn water to wine. He is able to heal the daughter of Jirus and to do these things and other miracles.

### **The One Commandment**

**Is it right to say that Jesus had only one commandment in contrast to the Ten Commandments, and that was “Love?”**

Jesus and St. Paul both made the same statement that the whole of the law is summed up:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)*

Our Lord said that this fulfills the law.

**Other teachers seem to embellish the Love Commandment making it more legal and complex such that many people are not grasping it.**

Love is not something to be forced as a “legal action.” Those who choose to do so will try to understand it while others may not grasp it at all. I don’t like the idea that all Jesus did was to give us these wonderful epigrams, these wonderful sayings, like, *Love God with all your heart ... and strength ... and love your neighbor as yourself*. Some would give him just that and then finally he goes to the cross and on Easter he conquers death. I think Jesus was very exciting to be around, and that’s why I don’t take his miracles away from him.

Karl Barth put it this way: *“What you mustn’t do is divide the word from the work. What Jesus said and what he did are inseparable. You’ve got to keep them both together.”*

## Metaphor and Parables

**It seems clear that Jesus uses metaphors for much of his communication, as he does in response to the crowd demanding that he give them bread when he replies that he is not the bread giver but the giver of life.**

Jesus does that with the parables too. The parables are marvelous short stories that he tells to illustrate a truth, and they are totally unforgettable. Bible critics say the church created the parables to make Jesus relevant to people. No, the woman who lost the coin and then swept the house, found the coin and, then had a big party, is a story that Jesus actually told. And the shepherd who had ninety-nine sheep who were safe and went for the one sheep that was lost is another story that Jesus told. I believe those were His parables.

**One of the stories that is known well was not found in some early translations:**

*“If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7 NIV)*

**(Why was that not included in some of the translations?)**

That’s an interesting question. In fact, I think this question is one of the most interesting bits of evidence in favor of the integrity of the Bible. That scene, John 8:1-10 might be seen as an “R rated” scene, and I can see where some in the early church might be tempted to say that it is dangerous to leave that in because it might show that Jesus is soft on the Law’s stand regarding adultery. This woman is not stoned; this woman is spared, and Jesus protects her from that mob. Maybe certain church writers thought it was a dangerous thing to have in the text. And so, consequently, in one group of manuscripts, John 8:1-10, the text does not appear. In other scrolls of the Gospel of John it is placed at the end as a postscript. Thank God, in a great number of manuscripts it was in John’s Gospel right where it is now. It was moved into Luke’s Gospel in certain other ancient manuscripts.

The monks, who copied the manuscripts by hand, knew that it belonged, so they moved it over to the end of John or they moved it over to the Book of Luke. And yet, the Monks saved the text, and

## SECTION III – SALVATION BY SURPRISE

fortunately in enough of the copied manuscripts it is right there in John 8 where it belongs. That gives you more confidence in the monks who did the copying. They were not going to allow that text to be totally left out.

### **Is Illness Due to Sin?**

**Another incident is about the blind man, where Jesus said the man's blindness has nothing to do with sin. Jesus restores sight to the blind man and then says,**

*"I've come into this world so that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind." (John 9:39 NIV)*

Yes, people in those times and still some at present, operate on the thesis that an illness must be a punishment for sin. Jesus denied this and in giving hope to healing people, essentially laid the foundation for the hospital movement.

We would never say that there are no illnesses or problems caused by a person's sin. The disciples were operating on the thesis that if you had a bad ailment, it must be a punishment. Many religious systems in the world do view illness as a punishment for you or your parents. Jesus said neither.

**There are illnesses such as AIDS related to the sin of promiscuity or accidental injury caused by drunken driving or drug usage.**

Jesus would say, let's help this person. Don't worry about trying to fix blame. For example, when a person has AIDS, or problems due to drunk driving, it is one thing to give a scolding, but it is more important to look at treatment, plans and care. People should be urged not to have reckless driving or reckless sexual behavior.

**As you have said, the stewardship of medicine is a gift. Miracles can occur with or without divine intervention.**

In fact, our Lord showed in the healing of that man born blind that he did care that we would try to help people who are sick. So in a way, all that caring for people who are sick comes from the gospel. It's not the only place that it comes from, but it does come from the gospel. And that is for all of us. That's where I think it's right that

**we care for all people who suffer. You can't deny the history that there are times we cannot explain an intervention leading to healing,**

**When miracles occur, this may truly be consider  
"Salvation by Surprise"**

## **Salvation By Surprise**

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

***Salvation by Surprise*** is itself a surprise as it outlines what would be a 22-week course. In Earl's book, pages 187- 198, there is a study guide. In the first question, Earl reveals his sense of drama as he asks you to pretend to be a Roman CIA agent analyzing a papyrus with only versus 1 to 7 of the first chapter of Paul's letter as evidence about the Christians.

***Romans 1: 1-7 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for gospel of God- the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.***

**For a more brief set of questions consider the following:**

1. What is the difference between an apostle and disciple?  
Can you be either?
2. Do you believe in miracles and have you experience any?  
Define "Miracle."
3. What is the "One Commandment" (in two parts) that has been said to encompass all others?
4. How do you distinguish literal truths from metaphors and parables in the Bible (e.g. Garden of Eden; sitting at the right hand of God, etc...)
5. Do you believe illness is brought on by sin?
6. Do you believe in prayers of intercession?

## ***Book Review by Stephen Yarnall***

**Earl Palmer's book on meeting Christ in the Sermon on the Mount was written in 1986 with a subsequent edition in 2001, published by Regent College Publishing in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The following chapter is my book review written in 2006.**

**For a 119-page paperback, this book packs a lot of wallop! Palmer's book, "The Enormous Exce tion" analyzes the words of Jesus with such a profound depth that a simple "book review" cannot do justice to his words. In this review I provide selective passages that offer new insights into the messages of Jesus.**

**Palmer comments that for any teaching to make a lasting impression it must include an exciting mixture of things hard to understand, as well as things easy to understand.**

**He invites readers of his book to be actively involved with questions on each part of the story relating Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5:3-12*).**

**Palmer's description of the times in history and the cultural interchange between Jews, Greeks, and Romans, along with a small but growing group of Christians, recreates the real story of the events surrounding the Sermon on the Mount. His honesty about words having different meanings within and between languages bolsters our confidence in the Bible as the inspired message from God transcending differences in specific words.**

**The hardiness of the collection of writings called "The Bible" has been tested over many years and cultures; over many cynics and scientists; and over the well-intentioned preaching and**

### SECTION III – THE ENORMOUS EXCEPTION

propaganda of those who have tried to force others into taking a rigid position.

Palmer believes in letting the words of the Bible speak for themselves. The Sermon on the Mount contains what are referred to as The Beatitudes, a poetically presented set of nine “blessed are” phrases.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*(Matthew 5:3-12)*

Palmer notes that the word “blessed” in the Greek language means “happy.” The Hebrew word for “blessed” is ashr, which means, “to find the right path.” Palmer does warn that when we pursue individual word studies, we must keep in perspective the meanings of a word as it appears in context.

Palmer writes that if you find the right way, then you are happy and that this is consistent with the Old Testament idea of happiness. It has to do with orientation, perspective, and the discovery of what is meaningful in the midst of shallow, superficial options.

**Matthew 5:13-16 includes the message,**

**“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”**

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 in precised form says:**

**“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them ... Sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be praised by men ... do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret ... and when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites when they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men ... When you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men.”**

**Palmer analyzes the above passages of Matthew and groups will delight in discussing the difference between letting your light shine versus acting in secrecy**

**Matthew 6:7-11: Palmer’s book also provides a profound basis for discussion of the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus says,**

***“In praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:***

***Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us the day our daily bread ...”***

**Palmer notes that the prayer starts by acknowledging the Kingdom of God, which is seen in the New Testament in relationship terms, not territorial terms. “Pray for the presence of God before you pray for anything else.”**

### SECTION III – THE ENORMOUS EXCEPTION

**Matthew 6:12, 14, 16:**

*“And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors ...”*

*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father  
also will forgive you.*

**Palmer notes that the Lord’s Prayer sometimes uses the English word “debts” and sometimes “trespasses” and sometimes “sins.” Palmer prefers the word “trespasses.”**

**Without giving away “the answer to the puzzle,” it is no secret that the Enormous Exception is Jesus Christ, but you will have to read the book to have Earl’s inimitable analysis and discussion, which itself is an “enormous exception.” Palmer’s book includes an exciting mixture of things hard to understand as well as things easy to understand, leaving a lasting impression on the reader. Not everyone will agree with me, of course, but I suspect everyone will agree that reading this book is an experience that is an enormous exception among books dealing with Biblical topics.**

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# The Enormous Exception

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*These questions are offered for individual meditation or small-group discussion related to your spiritual experience. Compare your views to those of Earl Palmer as presented in **The Enormous Exception**. I suggest you take one topic or a few at most, since so much can be said of these topics.*

1. What does it mean that teaching must include “an exciting mixture of things hard to understand, as well as things easy to understand.”
2. Since words have different meanings within and between languages what does it mean to say that the Bible is “**The Word of God.**”
3. Discuss each of the nine “Blessed are’s” of the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount?
4. Discuss the difference between “letting your light shine” versus acting in secret (“Not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”)
5. Do you understand the “Kingdom of God” in **relationship** terms, not **territorial** terms?
6. Do you prefer debts or trespasses in the Lords prayer? What difference do you see?
7. Do you agree that Palmer’s book includes a mixture of things hard to understand as well as things easy to understand? Is this experience “**An Enormous Exception**” among books dealing with Biblical topics?

**THE BOOK THAT**  
**JOHN WROTE**

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# THE BOOK THAT JOHN WROTE

*“A new command I give you: Love one another: As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)*

*Earl Palmer’s book, “The Book That John Wrote was first published as The Intimate Gospel in 1978 and republished under the current title in 2002 by Regent College Publishing in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. In this remarkable 190-page paperback Palmer makes clear the meaning of John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel is based on his intimate relationship with Jesus as a close friend and disciple.*

## Belief In Miracles

**Earl, why did you write this book on the Gospel of John?**

John was a witness and historian relating the events and miracles of Jesus. Whether or not you believe in miracles, you will be educated about the witnessed and reported miracles of Jesus. One’s belief about miracles and the meaning of life is a matter of individual choice but one is impressed by the events reported in this historical document.

*In your preface you include a great quote from G. K. Chesterton (Orthodoxy, pp.74-75):*

**“What a man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century ... If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age.”**

**What questions do you have regarding miracles?**

Twenty centuries later the questions and answers are the same to the questions: “Are there miracles? Are the stories about Jesus true? What is the meaning of life? Does God exist and is He able to speak for Himself?”

### SECTION III – THE BOOK THAT JOHN WROTE

The commentary I wrote in 1978 inquires of each paragraph of the Gospel: first of all – what does it mean within its own setting? Second – what does it mean for my life today?

My goals today are the same as they were in 1978: first – to understand the Gospel of John as a reliable narrative of events in the life of Jesus Christ; second – to consider some of the major technical-critical questions concerning this gospel; third – to focus on theological applications of the gospel; and fourth – to focus on the discipleship goal in terms of the meaning of John’s narrative of Jesus for my life here and now.

**Can you explain the first few verses of John that start out:**

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men... (John 1:1-4) There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came to bear witness to the light...(John 1:7) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14)*

The first 34 verses of John 1 are a prologue establishing Jesus as the prophesized Son of God. The rest of John’s book (gospel) deals with the life and miracles of Jesus as witnessed by John himself.

### **The Other John – John the Baptist**

*“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came to bear witness to the light...” (John 1:7)*

The John referred to in the scripture quoted above is John the Baptist. Many people thought of John the Baptist as the Christ, which he denied. He proclaimed, as he baptized Jesus, that this is the man who is the Son of God.

**What does John the Baptist say about Jesus?**

John the Baptist proclaimed, as he baptized Jesus,

*“I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”  
(John 1:34)*

Jesus came to the river with crowds of ordinary people to be baptized by John and John the Baptist expressed some disappointment in the way Jesus was carrying out his ministry. Jesus did not do what John the Baptist (prophet) had expected him to do.

Jesus seemed to evade some of the powers he could use and had priorities that John the Baptist had never expected. The next year of fulfillment and disappointment and the expectations of the people is proof of his true Messiahship.

*“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Christ.’*

*They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’*

*He said, ‘I am not.’*

*‘Are you the Prophet?’*

*He answered, ‘No.’*

*Finally they said, ‘who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’*

*John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’*

*Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’*

*‘I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the things of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’*

*This all happened in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’*

*Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God.’” (John 1:19-34)*

## **Difference Between Disciple & Apostle**

**It's interesting to observe the difference between a "disciple" and an "apostle."**

Throughout the Gospels the followers of Jesus are referred to as "disciples" and never as "apostles." "Disciple" is a more ordinary, common term used by Jesus. "Apostle" is a term later given to the twelve disciples and Paul.

**Earl, *"The Book That John Wrote"* makes the Bible so understandable that I would like to quote part of the last paragraph of Chapter 3:**

"The first surprise is that Jesus is not like we expected him to be ... Jesus is conversational rather than triumphal; he is a friendly listener drawing out real men in a real encounter, spending the day with them, finding out who they are, nick-naming them. Following the majestic chords of the prologue, and the great theme of John the Baptist, what we hear now is a melody line so simple and spare that at first it may elude us completely. But this is the Jesus Christ we meet."

**When were the early followers of Jesus called Christians?**

The followers of Jesus were first seen as a Jewish sect by the Romans and at Antioch they were first called "Christians."

In the first century the largest percentage of believers were Jewish, yet the synagogue still existed apart from the belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. A great number of Jewish people still do become Christians and they are our parents, in that we are children of Abraham, like they are children of Abraham, so we are in the same heritage together. Our greatest affinity, our greatest solidarity, is with our Jewish groups.

**I heard a comical comment from a rabbi saying, "Before He was one of yours, He was one of ours." How often do our Christian friends as well as anti-Semitic persons forget that Jesus was Jewish?**

In the first century one of the big issues was whether a gentile Christian had to become circumcised in order to meet the standard of Jewish law.

**Fortunately, the big issue of circumcision at that time is no longer an issue at all.**

**The disciples of Jesus were followers impressed by the person of Jesus and the miracles he performed. The first recorded miracle in the gospels was performed at a wedding where Jesus converted water to wine.**

## **Jesus' Water-To-Wine Miracle**

**How do you interpret Jesus' first miracle converting water-to-wine at a wedding?**

In John's baptism of Jesus at Jordan Jesus is identified with all people, and in the water-to-wine miracle and his discussion with his mother, he is revealed as totally separate and alone upon a journey that only He may undertake.

**What was his discussion with his mother about the wine?**

When Mary came up to Jesus and related that they have no wine, I don't think she was asking for a miracle. Some say Mary is interceding with Christ for us, but I think she was just scolding him like a Jewish mother would - that he had come to this wedding feast with all his friends, and he had not brought any wine, which he would have been expected to do. He would be expected to bring a gift and ordinarily a gift would be wine.

**We previously discussed the differences of interpretation of the water-to-wine miracle.**

Some interpreters suggest that water-to-wine event was a story to make Jesus "a good guy." I think that Jesus is interesting by himself and that all of his miracles did happen. I put my faith in direct observations reported by people who were with him. Quoting Karl Barth, "What you mustn't do is divide the Word from the work. What Jesus said and what He did are inseparable. You've got to keep them both together."

John's purpose in writing about this miracle is certainly to encourage our faith but it shows no signs of historical carelessness.

## **Destroy This Temple**

**Chapter 4 in your book beautifully documents your position.**

**What are your comments about the temple incident?**

*“...In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area ...” (John 2:12-25)*

Jesus is fulfilling the messianic prophesy of the Prophet Zechariah, *“And there shall no longer be a merchant in the house of the Lord of Hosts.”* Jesus turns over the tables of the merchants and frees the sacrificial animals. When some of the Jews questioned his authority by saying, *“What miraculous sign can you do to prove your authority to do all this?”* Jesus replied, *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”* They reminded Jesus that it had taken 46 years for the building of the great temple, but Jesus gave a message that would not be forgotten. The temple Jesus was referring to was his body, as later understood at the time of his resurrection.

## **Walking On Water**

**Your book gives a brief discussion about Jesus walking on water.**

**What can you say about the historical accuracy of this event as distinct from its account as an item of faith? (John 6:16-24)**

It is my belief that this event really happened, although I cannot explain how. This was a miracle recorded by more than one of the disciples and I see no reason to doubt their witness of this event.

**Do we just take this account of Jesus walking on the water by faith?**

I think he did it to startle the disciples. I don't think the writers play the role of novelists, to try to create a story to cheer us up or cheer up the account or give it more relevance to ordinary people. Jesus doesn't need the early church writers to build a story. It's not narrated in a way that loses my confidence in the narrators. The way the whole account is narrated is understated. The disciples are shocked by it too. They don't make a big teaching out of it, they simply narrate it, and from even that psychological – literary inquiry

point of view, I have confidence in the account even from the way it was narrated.

Why did Jesus send his disciples out in the boat in the first place? One wonders. But he did tell them to go on out, and then he comes on out when the water gets rough. I would think you would need a lot of evidence to go against the early church witness – the Gospel witness, instead of simply saying, “One wonders” or to simply stand and say, “Well, there it is,” and it just stands.

It is wise to look for markers of fraudulence in any story and for things that are self-serving. I don’t see that in the Gospel accounts.

**I have a sacrilegious joke that is a take-off from this Biblical message.**

*A Catholic priest, a presbyterian minister and a Jewish rabbi were fishing in a boat close to shore. The minister bowed his head in silent prayer then excused himself in order to go ashore to relieve himself. He stepped over the side of the boat and walked on water to the shore, returning to the boat shortly thereafter. The priest crossed himself three times and then did the same thing. The rabbi, not to be outdone, said a few prayers out loud, stepped over the side of the boat and promptly sank. As the priest and minister pulled him back in the boat, the minister said to the priest, “Do you think we should tell him where the rocks are. ’*

## **Jesus's Method of Communication**

**What are Jesus' special methods of communication?**

Jesus communicates through action. He also uses metaphor as he does in response to the crowd demanding that he give them bread, and he replies that he is not the bread-giver, but that he, himself, is the bread of life. ( John 6:35)

Jesus is known for his parables which are marvelous short stories that he tells to illustrate a truth – and they are totally unforgettable.

## Avoiding Traps

**In another incident where a woman accused of adultery is about to be stoned, Jesus takes her beside him, writes something in the sand (we don't know what) and says,**

*“Let him who is without sin throw the first stone.”*

*(John 7:53 - 8:11)*

**This text is not found in some of the early translations. Why do you think this is?**

Jesus was well aware of the Jewish law that called for stoning a woman caught in the act of adultery. He was aware that a trap was being set to catch him standing in the way of the Judaic law. In a way they had violated the law because the law says that they should bring the man and the woman who are caught in adultery, and they had brought only the woman. Jesus doesn't really back up the law because they had not practiced that law for many, many years in Jewish society. Notice how beautifully Jesus protects the woman without directly violating the law.

The omission of this text in some of the early translations is one of the most interesting markers in favor of the integrity of the Bible.

## Prayer

**Does God make “a choice” when we offer prayers of intercession?**

*(John 9:1-41)*

He sometimes says “no,” sometimes says “yes,” and sometimes says “wait.”

**What would you think of another model in which He created the “force of prayer” and let it operate on its own?**

I would never want prayer turned into an art form, so that if you get really good at this form, you would have a potential force of prayer. I do think there is power in prayer that is a mystery. But I wouldn't want to create a doctrine about mastering that power. Then I think you would get into the danger of the charlatan faith healers who feel they have a special power of prayer. I think prayer always has to be a mystery before God.

## **More than restoring sight Jesus restores life to Lazarus ; why not for others?**

C. S. Lewis has a great line on that one. He says that Lazarus is the most unlucky man in the Bible – he has to die twice. Dying is no fun, and he has to do it twice. So if being raised from the dead is not that much of a blessing for Lazarus ...

**It might not be a blessing for our loved ones.**

## **Free Will and God's Will**

With God's gift of free will without predestination, there can be accidents and illnesses affecting any of us. Sometimes events just happen and it's best to see them as just happening. "Just happening" is a part of life. We all have to die. We have a bounded existence, and we don't live forever. There is a frailty that is in the body and it finally exerts itself. Regarding your accident of falling from the chair lift, it just happened and therefore it is a mistake to blame God or to try to understand God's special will in such situations. We ask for His presence and help which is what we do with prayers of intercession. Prayers are different for a ninety-year old person than for twenty year olds. We pray urgently for intervention and healing for the young beyond what would be asked for ninety year olds.

When my Dad was gravely ill and dying, I took my son to be with my Dad, but I wouldn't ask God to heal him, for Dad had enjoyed a very full life. He was 97. He waited until I got there and it was very touching. We sang "Amazing Grace" and he was totally alert. He greeted me when I walked in with my son. My Dad loved the Marines and my sister and I stood by his bed and sang, "From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli ..." The nurse came in and said to my sister, "Your Dad is dead." There was rightness about this outcome.

But if I had been at the bedside of a twenty year old, I would have prayed quite differently. You are going to fight like everything for a cure and you work up to the end in prayer in a case like this. *We ask for help and guidance in our prayers, but finally we must trust God's will.*

### SECTION III – THE BOOK THAT JOHN WROTE

**Sometimes when people take risks they shouldn't take, or go where they shouldn't go, they can have accidents.**

I just read the book **"Into Thin Air."** The guides broke every single rule – staying on Mt. Everest too long. They knew they should have come down sooner, but the customers paid to get to the top. They should have paid to get them down safely. Several of them lost their lives. This was a matter of poor choice.

**There are many poor choices in medicine related to alcohol, tobacco, obesity and unsafe driving.**

I guess the way to put it would be – freedom is a huge word in the Bible. The first place where it really appears is in Genesis when Adam and Eve are given dominion (which means authority) over the earth. That's the beginning of the freedom language of the Bible.

You don't really have freedom if you don't have power. That means your free decision has impact. I believe that is a basic principle throughout the Old and New Testament – that men and women are given dominion – authority, which has impact on history. I do not agree with those who say we do not have any impact on history.

In the Old and New Testament alike, throughout the Psalms and throughout the law, it would make no sense at all if there were not freedom – the free will on the part of the hearers of the law. Otherwise why does it make any sense to honor thy father and mother? It would be an automatic thing. No, we are given a choice. Thou shall not commit murder. We are given the choice of whether we are going to cross over and do harm to our neighbor.

**"Thou shalt not covet..."** The word covet makes no sense at all if the person hearing the word doesn't have freedom, whether it's desire to covet somebody else's property or not to.

**"Thou shalt not bear false witness."** In other words, that only makes sense if the person who hears that command has the right to tell lies and will perpetually choose to tell lies instead of telling the truth.

The same thing comes to faith. There would be no point in talking about **"enter by the narrow gate,"** or **"the wise man is a man who hears these words of mine and does them."** That's a pure freedom sense coming from our Lord described in Chapter 7 of Matthew.

There is a gap between hearing and doing – a freedom gap that I get to decide. If I get inside the gap, then I am held accountable.

Having said all of that, there still is God's freedom as well. If I have freedom to make a choice, God has freedom, and he may surprise me with some of his freedom choices. The greatest freedom choice that God makes is his choice to love us, to show grace to us, and to show forgiveness when we wouldn't ordinarily expect it, when we would expect consequences. And then God decides to show grace to us instead of just the consequences of our bad choices. This is a surprise and is why I named my Commentary on the Book of Romans, "**Salvation by Surprise.**" We expect to get consequences for our bad choices, yet an amazing breakthrough occurs when God forgives us instead of judging us.

**The concept of pre-destination seems in contrast to free will. Genes predestine biological variables such as height. I'm never going to be a star basketball player for a lot of reasons. We are predestined in a certain direction but not to specific or exact distance to go in that direction. Genetic variability provides restrictions and opportunities, which are modified by the choices we make with our free will.**

Excellent – or put it this way. I try to understand and reconcile these two great truths: God is sovereign and has ultimate authority, yet we have authority over our own choices. This means that we have real freedom. One of the sovereign decisions that God made is the decision to give us genuine freedom.

**One of God's sovereign decisions is to give each of us a unique DNA profile. It is a decision God makes for us, but another part of that sovereign decision is that he lets us work with the expression of our DNA code. With your own free will you must decide what you're going to do with what you've been given.**

You can't do everything – for instance, we cannot become God. If we do try to be a god, we do it fraudulently because we are not meant to be God. We are meant to be human beings and we are given a tremendous freedom for which we are held accountable. We're given freedom and must decide what to do with it. This is a sovereign decision that God makes. So free will is a gift from God

### SECTION III – THE BOOK THAT JOHN WROTE

preserving his sovereignty and our free will, standing together in a kind of dialectical tension.

**The ultimate example of free will is that of Jesus choosing to sacrifice His life for us. This was prophesized in the Old Testament, although at the time of his death He was not recognized as the promised Messiah. We are told that his disciples found it hard to accept his choice in sacrificing his life.**

Yes, Jesus' disciples are troubled by his words as described in John 13: 31-38 and John 14:1-4. At this time Jesus stresses his most important commandment.

## **Jesus' New Commandment**

**In chapter 27 of your book "The Book that John Wrote" you discuss the central teaching of Jesus as spoken to his disciples:**

***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you." (John 13:34-35)***

That summarizes Jesus' teaching which fulfills the law as expressed in the Old Testament. (Lev. 19:18)

In my book I discuss how the disciples are troubled by Jesus' farewell discourse:

- ***"Where I am going you cannot come."* (John 13:36)**
- ***"Peace I leave you ... let not your hearts be thrown into confusion."* (John 14:1)**
- ***"In my father's house are many dwelling places."* (John 14:2-3)**

## **Pilate's Problem**

**Finally, as we approach the end of your book, John discusses the awkward position of Pilate who found no crime in Jesus worthy of death. (John 19:1-16)**

Since the time of Pilate, many men and women have discovered that to defend an unpopular person from injustice almost always results in the hatred of the crowd and inevitably results in the shift of the attack from the accused to the person who dares to defend him.

**It appears that hatred of an idea is translated to hatred of the person discussing the idea. Countless religious wars over the centuries give proof of this.**

**Earl, your book concludes:**

**Those who have allowed the Gospel of John to be the document that it claims to be (a truthful narrative about Jesus Christ) have discovered that the gospel has drawn them to the point where a choice must be made between two options – belief and non-belief.**

**John's account of Jesus Christ is as fresh and real today as it was over two thousand year ago.**

**It is my prayer that others will read the Bible's Book of John, along with Earl Palmer' , "The Book That John Wrote."**

**\*\*\*\***

## **The Book That John Wrote**

# **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*These questions are offered for individual meditation and/or small group discussion related to Earl Palmer's book, "The Book That John Wrote." Also see Study Guide and Bibliography in Earl's book.*

1. Do you believe in miracles?
2. Are there any of Jesus' miracles that you find hard to believe?
3. Have you had any experience with modern day miracles?
4. Why do you think John the Baptist was disillusioned with Jesus' presentation as the Messiah?
5. In the water-to-wine miracle, was it a good wine?
6. What temple was Jesus talking about when he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up"?
7. A Community Church with 2 services a day announces the topic of the morning service as, "Jesus Walks on Water" and gives the title for the evening service as, "Searching for Jesus." Which sermon would you prefer?
8. How did the communications of Jesus differ from persons of his era and provide us a model for communicating today?
9. Discuss how Jesus avoided trap questions. Are there other methods we can use?
10. Discuss how the Bible includes paradox, parable, metaphor, story telling, and variations in language translations.
11. Discuss the balance of free will and predetermination in your life.
12. Is Jesus' New Commandment about love really new?
13. Are there examples of "Pilate's Problem syndrome" in your experiences?
14. Do you believe that faith is a choice?

# INTEGRITY

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# INTEGRITY

*It's a pleasure and a rare privilege to have extended dialogue with an author such as Earl Palmer. We had such a dialogue on his book "Integrity:" A Commentary on the Book of Philippians, copyright 1992 by Earl Palmer; 3<sup>rd</sup> edition published 2000 by Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.*

**Earl, how do you define integrity?**

It would be comforting if, at the conclusion of this discussion, we could have a simple definition of "integrity" with some simple guidelines for achieving it. But integrity is not a matter of doing or not doing certain things. It is a way of life. It affects everything we do, from the big life-changing decisions we must make to the small incidental encounters in the supermarket. When we try to reduce it to a simple set of rules we have missed the point.

## Current Relevance

**Earl, you have written a masterful book based on the New Testament Book of Philippians, which was written by St. Paul as a letter nearly 2,000 years ago. How is this letter relevant to our problems and needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

One of the amazing features of the Bible is its timeless relevance to human problems over all these years. Our problems remain basically the same, as do the most basic answers to these problems, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, known to us through prayer and study of the Bible.

**It is interesting to me that the problems in theology are now so much the same and the answers are the same. In contrast, my medical school professor stated, as he passed out the final exam, "the questions are the same as last year – only the answers have changed. In medicine the answers keep changing. What was yesterday's dogma is today's heresy and visa versa.**

You know, it's interesting that you bring this up. You are right that specialized religious answers go out of date fast. But the grand

central truths don't go out of date. Love and faithfulness do not go out of date, but specific specialized religious answers, like certain formulas that we come up with when we prescribe to people as ways to become spiritually deep, or ways to have strong faith, many of those have very short shelf life.

**Actually there are a number of basic principles of integrity for medical practitioners: "First of all – do no harm" ... "look at the patient's problems in context of the whole person" ... "consider cost – effectiveness of therapeutic options" ... etc.**

**Back to integrity as discussed in your book, you note that Paul sends this letter off near the end of a remarkable life in which he had lived through the times of extreme danger, which he survived by encouragement from his friends.**

Yes, Paul was a man of integrity who knew who he was. He didn't have the need to impress readers of his letters with the dangers he encountered or with anything other than living in the good center of his faith in Jesus.

## **Meaning of Integrity in Relationships**

**Your book introduces the subject of "Integrity" by noting that we are often very busy and have the feeling of never really fulfilling our obligations, as our lives are stretched to the limit without a clear sense of priority or focus. What do you mean by this, and what do you mean by "integrity?"**

First of all, integrity means the condition of having the parts of our personality fit together with congruity. The second sense of integrity has a meaning that is related to actions based on sound, moral principles and uncorrupted character, especially in relationship to truth and fair dealing. Persons of "integrity" are clear about their priorities.

**Is the word "integrity" frequently used in the Bible?**

Although it is a major theme of the Bible, the word "integrity" is rarely used. Words such as "faith" and "love" have been used so much and are so familiar to us that, due to their frequent use, we often lose sight of their meaning.

**The concept of “integrity” lets us look at the Bible with a more open-minded view. In applying this concept, does someone who has personal problems with their job or marriage find it difficult to achieve integrity?**

It’s precisely through circumstances that threaten integration of our lives that we come closer to achieving a life of true integrity. A friendship that has been threatened by misunderstanding and has survived will be stronger and more lasting than a friendship that is based on mere comfort. A marriage in which the partners have struggled with conflict and adversity and overcome them achieves a stronger marriage relationship with more integrity than one that has never been threatened.

**Earl, you indicate that integrity of relationships requires good communication.**

Yes, communication means more than the fast track systems of cell phones, e-mail and answering machines. We have forgotten how to write letters and have lost skills of reading and writing. Writing provides opportunities for more complex expression of feelings and ideas. It’s important that we read slowly and reflectively to understand the full range of what is being said.

**Yes, and I agree we need to be good listeners. Three quotes come to mind:**

- *God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as talk. (Source unknown)*
- *Listening is the first step of love. (Dale Turner)*
- *The more I listen, the more I see. (Yogi Berra)*

## **Perfection**

**Does St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians suggest that we have to be perfect to have an integrated life?**

The integrity of faith demands that we give up the illusion of perfection and face the truth about the world, about ourselves and about the church. This is what Paul does in his letter to the Philippians. Tensions in the church are signs of the need to work for integration. Controversies in churches are not new. They have been

occurring since the beginning of Christianity. On the one hand, it is unfortunate that Christian fellowship has a history of internal conflict, but on the other hand, resolving problems can lead to greater strength.

*I remember Nietzsche's wisdom:*

*"Everything that doesn't kill me makes me stronger"*

### **How did Paul deal with the disagreements that were dividing the church in Philippi?**

Paul encouraged the believers to focus on Christ as the basis for unity. He encouraged them to focus on love, fellowship and mutual affection as tools to guide them through disagreements. Paul was basically an originator of the concept of "the power of positive thinking." He helped individuals deal with problems by focusing on what they had in common rather than focusing on their differences.

Just as Paul helped the church to focus on the center point of God, he maintained his own integrity through his focus on Jesus Christ. Paul urged believers to build relationships based on the experiences of encouragement received from Christ and among themselves, rather than favoring the anger and destructive divisions in the church and culture around them.

## **Acceptance, Joy and Love**

**As it says in Philippians 2:14-18, "Do all things without grumbling or questioning...be glad and rejoice with me."**

In spite of the many hardships Paul endured, he is still able to say, "...be glad and rejoice with me." He lived a life of sharing the love of Jesus with others.

### **What is the role of "love" in dealing with conflict and lack of integration between individuals?**

"The greatest integrating force in life is love – being loved for who we are, not what we are able to achieve and do. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to inter-personal integration is our inability to accept love, to allow ourselves to be loved by God and by people."

We could have a long discussion on “love” based on the Bible, with the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians, “...and the greatest of these is LOVE.” Two of my favorite books are: Leo Buscaglia’s classic text, simply titled “Love” and Gerry Jampolski’s “Love Is Letting Go of Fear.” The role of love and prayer in my survival is described in my book, “Beyond Medicine.”

## **Dealing with Dishonesty**

**How does love deal with dishonesty?**

The best defense against dishonesty is integrity. The strategy of integrity may appear slower but it is better because we never need to cover our tracks and remember the different stories we told to different people. Most of all, it is the strategy that is validated by the truth of God’s character.

**If you tell the truth you don’t have to remember what you said.**

## **Honest differences**

**What about “honest differences” within the church?**

One major question in the church of the first century was, “Is it necessary for non-Jewish believers in Christ to be circumcised as a vital part of their journey of faith? ... Should a non-Jewish believer first become Jewish to become part of God’s covenant with Abraham and follow the Gospel of Christ? Paul, himself, treasured his Jewish ancestry and legacy and if anyone could claim to have the correct credentials for being a true Jew, it was Paul. At one point, Paul himself circumcised his Greek friend Timothy. But Paul came to realize that this symbolic entry into the tradition of the law of the prophets had become theologically distorted. Some Jewish Christians in Jerusalem saw circumcision as essential to achieve the promises of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul spoke movingly that the non-Jewish believer does not need to become a Jew in order to know Christ’s grace and stood firm in his refusal to allow the circumcision of another Greek friend.

Bad theory and bad practice have a long and persistent staying power – even when the church has decided in favor of integration of a greater truth. *The church in every generation needs a purifying,*

***performing and correcting ministry of sound teaching and sound doctrine. We are always in danger of going astray. Usually, going astray is motivated by a hard-truth proclaimed as a theory that appears more reverent and more devout than what other churches are teaching. False teaching is often very difficult to sort out because it has an aura of sincere discipleship about it.***

New movements in the church challenge us to renewal and reformation. But when the challenge weakens our confidence in the total sufficiency of the gospel, then the situation is radically different and has nothing to do with renewal for integrity. It is instead a careful "set-up" of a group of Christians to make us so intimidated and broken in our discouragement that we are the more easily drawn into the specialized doctrines of the new movement.

It's important to maintain "integrity of perspective" in which we see issues that matter very little versus issues that matter more. We need to focus on the generosity of love and the central point of love in the integrated life.

## **Rituals of Sacrifice**

### **What about the ancient rituals of sacrifice?**

Paul teaches the Philippians a new understanding of sacrifice. Rituals of sacrifice have made up a large part of the practice of religion throughout human history. With many of the rituals being grim and brutal acts, the change promoted by Paul was dramatic in terms of a new understanding of sacrifice and changing the concept of what is sacrificed in order to become a follower of Christ. As Christians our sacrifice is the sacrifice of praise and faith because Christ is the one who fulfilled all of the ancient meaning of sacrifice. (Phil. 2)

It's important for the church to change with new understandings such as related to sacrifice, but the church itself and our involvement in its programs should not become a substitute for Jesus Christ.

## **Change in Paul’s Belief**

**Paul himself in his earlier years, when he was known as Saul, was a learned Jewish man of deep convictions, who initially perceived the followers of Christ as a threat to the truth of God. His zeal was exemplified by his approval of the stoning of Stephen, which he later deeply regretted.**

**As a Christian, Paul had a new meaning for integrity compared to his pre-Christian days. In verses 12 to 14 of Chapter 3, Paul states that he “has not yet arrived” and is not perfect. This is a comfort to those of us who feel inadequate as Christians. God does not expect us to have won the race, but expects us to run the race. The integrated person accepts that the grace of God resolves the guilt of the past and removes anxiety about the future, while we focus on the present.**

## **Dealing With Anxiety**

**How does an integrated person deal with anxiety?**

*Paul says in the Bible, in Philippians 4:4-7:*

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let our gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul continues by writing in Philippians 4:8-9 words that describe characteristics of integrity:

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*

This is Paul’s view of “integrity of perspective” which enables us to experience the peace of God and the God of Peace. One of the hallmarks of Christian integrity and personal integration is that circumstances lose their overwhelming power over us.

## Women in the Church

**Do you think that the position of women in society has changed in churches?**

I think that the grand goal stays unchanged. In Christ there is neither male nor female, there is neither Greek nor Jew, there is neither slave nor free. There is a oneness that we have in Christ. That is the grand truth.

Whatever the role that women should play in the life of the church, the grand truth stay the same. The specific formulas that were designed by the church as to where to place women and what women could really do in the church, have gone through a tremendous transformation, and I think for the good. There has been a greater realization of the full roles that women should play in the leadership in the church. In the times of the New Testament when society was basically patriarchal, women weren't given the roles that they really could have had. The grand truth was there; the specific forms that the church was designing at that time were culturally influenced. You can't blame the New Testament for that.

**I see no better way to end this chapter on INTEGRITY than paraphrasing the last sentences of your book:**

Christian life has its demands, problems and joys. We are called to show by word and example what it means to live our lives with Christian integrity keeping in mind the words of Paul:

*“Not that I have already obtained integrity or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own”*

## **Integrity**

# **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*This is an outline of questions and topics for discussion related to Earl Palmer's book, originally published in 1992 by InterVarsity Press as "Integrity in a World of Pretense: Insights From the Book of Philippians" and copyrighted by Earl Palmer; re-published in 2000 by Regent Publishing. Also see the excellent "Study Guide to Philippians".*

1. How do you define integrity?
2. What is the opposite of integrity?
3. Give an example in your own life where "integrity" was an issue?
4. Do you think the answers to questions from 2000 years ago are likely to still be relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
5. Can you give any examples in medicine where there are different answers to questions today than there were in the past? ... How about in the church?
6. How does integrity fit into the life of an individual with personal problems in job, health or marriage?
7. Does St. Paul's letter to the Philippians suggest that we have to be perfect to have "an integrated life"?
8. What is the role of "love" in dealing with lack of integration between individuals?
9. How does love deal with dishonesty?
10. What are some "honest differences" within the church in the past and in the present?
11. What are your thoughts about ancient rituals and sacrifice?
12. What about Jesus' sacrifice?
13. What do you think of Paul's view of "integrity of perspective"?
14. How has the role changed for women in the life of the church?

# I John, II John, III John & Revelation

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# I JOHN, II JOHN, III JOHN & REVELATION

*This dialogue is based on Earl's book, "The Preacher's Commentary," one of a series published by Word Inc. Earl's contribution, written in 1981, and published the next year, is an analysis of the books of I John, II John, III John and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. The editor of this series, Lloyd Ogilbie, notes that Earl is "distinguished for his penetrating analysis and lucid explanation of verses and passages of Scripture." Ogilbie comments, "Earl Palmer has a unique ability to get to the essence of the language, background, meaning, and message of the Bible." He continues, "Earl has a commitment to be a communicator and weaves together literary material with vivid illustrations, metaphors and humor. He has a rare ability to communicate his own excitement about the discoveries he has made in his own studies..."*

*This dialogue deals with Earl's desire to communicate the full impact of John's message about life, truth and love. Earl brings new insights and a distinctly different approach to the Book of Revelation, a pivotal book in the New Testament.*

**Earl, who was the "John" who wrote these letters to the early churches?**

I believe that these books were written by John, the disciple of Jesus, who is the same John, the son of Zebedee, who wrote the Gospel of John. John wrote these books in Greek using "short, crisp sentences and plain, clear words," much in the style of Winston Churchill. As an example:

**"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." (I John 1:5)**

# I JOHN

## Light & Truth

### What is meant by “light” ?

When John uses the word light, he is very aware of the Greek world of thought where light parallels truth, and also light over against darkness. Remember that John writes in Greek but he is thinking in the great Old Testament Hebrew metaphors. In Hebrew light is very much thought of as light over against darkness, but very much as light for your pathway. In Psalm 119,

*“Thy law is a light for my pathway ... a light unto my way”.*  
(Psalms 119:105)

The Hebrew understanding of the Old Testament is very concrete and pathway oriented. So I think he is thinking both – God is light and there is no darkness at all. This means that God is true, he is not false, but also John the writer is thinking of “*light for my pathway.*” God shows me the way, unlike when you are in the darkness, you don’t know where you are going.

*“Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning ... which thing is true in Him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”*

(I John 1:7-8)

*“God is light – in Him is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5)*

What John has done there is say that God is committed to light. Therefore God is not going to deceive. He is not going to use a deceptive trick to get us to believe, because that would favor the way of darkness. This rules out for God the use of deceptive propaganda or ‘heavenly deception’ in order to win us over. He is going to win us with truth and therefore he doesn’t have to cover his tracks for fear we will find him out and say, “Oh, you used a trick to get us in.” The problem with deception is if I use deception of any kind to get somebody to do something or to believe something, then I always have to be covering my tracks – I always have to be watching out that someone is

going to find out that I used a deception. But if I speak the truth in the beginning, then I don't have to worry about remembering what I said.

Darkness hides and confuses pathways but light makes the roadway discernable. John allies God with the way of truth, against the way of falsehood. This alliance is important for a Christian understanding of science. There should be no fear for scientific study as a way of truth for the Christian, because truth of any kind does not threaten a house that, itself, is founded upon truth...

**God is truth, light and love. He has no dark side of hatred and deception.**

John says,

*“... he who hates his brother is in darkness ... and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” (I John 2:11)*

## **Love is the Message**

**In any case, John has one clear message:**

*“Let us love one another. Love is of God. And everyone who loves is born of God and loves God. He who does not love does not know God, but God is love. The love of God is manifested towards us. God has sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him ... No one has seen God at any time ... If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us ...” (I John 4:7-12)*

**Here's the rest of the chapter that we know so well.**

*“Someone who says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar. For if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen. He who loves God should love his brother also.” (I John 4:20-21)*

At this point John is crystal clear – the commandment is to love. This is illustrated elsewhere in the New Testament when Jesus answers the question, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answers,

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-38)*

Jesus himself said,

*“And all the law is fulfilled in these two ...*

*love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself.”*

The one flows out of the other. We love because He first loved us, so you might say it is one grand commandment – the first commandment, and everything flows out of it. It’s called The Great Commandment. (Matthew 22:39-40)

## Agape

### What is your concept of the term agape for love?

The word agape is used twenty-eight times in verses 1 to 21 in Chapter 4 of I John. **Agape** is the most used New Testament word for love. What you need to know is that the word agape in classical Greek means very little. It was a very bland word, meaning “good will.” What happened is that the Septuagint translators of the Hebrew Bible in 100 B.C. needed to find a Greek word to translate the marvelous Hebrew word **Hasad**, which is the Hebrew word for love, a rich, wonderful word that means to hug. So, what Greek word will they use to translate it? They had a big challenge.

If they used the word **Eros** which in Greek mythology is the supreme and powerful word for love, but it is not what the love of God is. **Eros** is the love that is seductive, the love of power, the love of beauty, and that’s why it becomes the word for sexual attraction. Yet it is the glorious word in Greek mythology ... this word Eros ... a powerful word filled with desire and the love of beauty. But that’s not the love of God. God does not love us because we are powerful or because we are beautiful. God’s love is for all of us in spite of our sins. God’s love is a different kind of love than Eros.

The other Greek word is **Phileo**. **Phileo** love is an instinctive, natural love as love for our family. This word is used in the New Testament, but **Phileo** is not rich and deep enough to explain the love that goes beyond instincts of family connection. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” So the Septuagint Rabbis had a dilemma on their hands – would they use Eros or use **Phileo**?

So what they did was to reach into the Greek language and take a rare word – agape – like teen-agers do when they create slang. Teens take a word like “cool” and give it a new meaning. To be a

“cool person” began to have a positive meaning in teenage language, yet the word itself is a very mild word and doesn’t mean much of anything. Cool means “not hot,” — not cold, but cool. It was the teen-agers who took that word and gave it a new meaning. That’s what happened in the New Testament as they use the newly coined word “Agape.”

John defines the word agape by it’s use. God loved us first and sent his Son to redeem us.

*“If you don’t love your neighbor whom you see, how can you love God whom you don’t see?”*

John wonderfully defines love, just like all those verses in *I Corinthians 13*, where Paul eloquently defines love.

*“If I speak with the tongues of men and angels and I don’t have (agape) love, what am I?*

and then he says,

*“love is not jealous, love is not rude, it does not insist on it’s own way ...”*

Then he says,

*“... and prophecies and all those things pass away, but love still stands.”*

Do you see what he is doing? Paul is defining love. When he gets to the end of *I Corinthians 13* he says,

*“Faith, hope and love abide ...all three of these, but the greatest is love.”*

We can see what John has done. He has defined love the same way Paul did in *Romans 5* when he expressed that ... Herein is love, not that we love God, he loved us. Scarcely would you die for another man, but God shows his love for us ... although we were sinners, he died for us.

John has a beautiful passage about agape – love:

*“Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love ... the love of God was manifested towards us ... God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him ... No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us ... We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear ... fear involves*

*torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love ... If someone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen ... he who loves God must love his brother also." (1 John 4: 7-21)*

## **God in the Old Testament**

**Maybe you can help me in an area that always perplexes me. In the New Testament God is love and the main theme of the New Testament is love, the Old Testament strikes me as focused on the anger and vengeance of God.**

There is judgment in the Old Testament but it is never the last word. It's always the next to the last word, and the last word is still "grace" in the Old Testament just as it is in the New. The Ten Commandments, for example, start with love. God expressed his love for his people by rescuing them from slavery. That is love.

Love is what God does. Love is an event in the Old Testament and it's an event in the New Testament when Jesus Christ died for us. It is Jesus Christ touching the person with leprosy and healing him. It is Jesus Christ attending a banquet with the Pharisees, accepting them and the different people who are there. That's what He does because of love.

**This week's UPC bulletin quote is from Pope Benedict's "God Is Love": "We have come to believe in God's love and with these words a Christian can express the fundamental decisions of life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event - the person which gibes life a new horizon and decisive direction."**

He is using the same event language that I used.

**I don't know where I got the notion, but I still have an impression that God in the Old Testament is angry and vengeful...**

## Judgment & Grace

I think it's quite common, but you have to see grace in the Old Testament just as you see it in the New. It's there in the Psalms and in the books of the prophets. There is judgment in the Old Testament but the judgment stands next to grace. Here is a good rule of thumb regarding judgment passages. The judgment passage is always next to the grace passage. Take *Isaiah 1* as a perfect example ... there is as much judgment with about as much severity as you could imagine there. It is really harsh,

***“Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah.”***

He is talking to people as if they are from Sodom and Gomorrah, the two cities that God destroyed. Relating to their sacrifices, the Lord said,

***“ I have had enough of your burnt offerings and rams.  
And I do not delight in the blood of bulls or lambs ...  
Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me.”***

He doesn't even like their Sabbaths.

***“... the calling of your assemblies – now comes the harshest of all – I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.”***

***“Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates.  
They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them.  
So when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you.  
How much judgment do you want? Even though you make many prayers I will not listen to you”.***

This is God speaking to his people.

***“And here's why – your hands are full of blood.”***

***“Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.”***

That's just another way of saying, “repent!”

***“Remove evil from what you are doing. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.”***

He is saying to do it incrementally even ...

***“Seek justice, correct oppression, defend the father, plead for the widow.”***

That's God's advice, and here comes the best part – this is the big surprise.

***“Come now, let us reason together” says the Lord.***

Wherever you see the harsh hand of judgment in the Old Testament prophets, grace is almost always alongside. It is very important that

we don't read the grace passage without the judgment passage, or that we read the judgment passage without the grace passage.

Bonhoeffer has a great line – “You can't hear the last word until u've heard the next to th last word.” The next to the last word is judgment. The last word is grace.

**What about the things that God did to man – like the locusts?**

They are certainty scenes of judgment.

**And from Jesus we don't see that sort of thing.**

In Jesus, the most severe judgment comes upon him. That's the meaning of the cross. He who knew no sin, he takes it on our behalf. But it's still judgment, except that when the judgment should fall, because of the amazing gift of grace, instead of it falling on me, Jesus steps in front of me. It's almost like the Secret Service Agents that fall on the President to take the bullet that's supposed to go to the President. They cover him. That's the way the Secret Service actually protects the president. They surround him and wherever the president goes in a crowd, they form a star around him. You can tell, they are the ones with the earplugs in their ears and those are the ones wearing suits, and they create a human star around the president. If anything happens, they take him down to the ground and cover him.

In the Hebrew language the word “atonement” is the word “to cover.” Atonement is fulfilled in Christ.

## **Idols in Modern Living**

**In I John it is said,**

*“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.  
Amen.” (I John 5:21)*

**What sorts of idols are most prevalent in our world and culture? Can the Bible itself be an idol?**

Idol, as a verb, means to cast a shadow. An idol is when I have given something a meaning that it doesn't really have or deserve.

A crocodile is a wonderful animal, I guess, but you should not project any power to that crocodile because he is awesome and fearsome. We should steward that animal, you should not worship the animal. We should not worship the cobra, which Egypt did for

awhile, nor worship the bull as a symbol of fertility. If we worship the animal we impart a meaning on it that it doesn't have. That is idolatry.

The same thing is true for money, which is probably the most common idol is our society. If I project a meaning on it that it doesn't rightly have and say, "*Money is the secret to my happiness*" ... then I have made an idol out of money.

And I can do the same with the Bible. I can project a meaning on it that it doesn't really have. I could treat the Bible as if it were a magical book. It is not. It is a witness to Christ. It is possible to make an idol out of a church, family, sex, sports figures, movie stars, etc.

## **bible or Bible?**

**In terms of our respect for the Bible, without idolizing it, should we spell it with a small "b" or a capital "B" in writing?**

The word "bible" means "the book". When referring to the book of sacred scriptures it is capitalized, as in the "Holy Bible". When referring to a book as a bible for repairs of something, then the word is not capitalized.

## **I am the way ...**

**When Jesus says,**

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6),*

**how do you bring this into your own life?**

I've been a Christian long enough to see the daily truthfulness of these unforgettable sentences in the book of John. Our lives work better when we live from the true center, Jesus Christ. It's also true that the more we grow in loving people around us, the more love we experience. Love is so durable and powerful that it's resourcefulness never wears out.

I have also discovered that the more I grow as a Christian, the better I feel about myself.

## **I I JOHN**

**II John consists of one page with a total of only thirteen verses. It is written, "To the elect lady and her children". Some scholars take issue with the interpretation that the term "elect lady" refers to a church in Asia Minor. Your belief is that this was a letter written by John to a close friend and her family. Do you still hold this view?**

### **Who or What is "The Elect Lady"**

I try to follow a general rule of thumb, that in biblical interpretation it is better to take the leaner interpretation, unless you have a lot of evidence otherwise, then the more luxurious interpretation may be taken. The leaner interpretation takes such passages at face value — and the face value of "the elect lady and her children" would ordinarily refer to a woman and her children. But if you say, I really think he has a church in mind, I don't have any problem with that, but that is a more luxurious interpretative model. The leanest interpretive model would not be to spiritualize the words with a more awkward meaning — just let it be as it is. If it says something, just let it say it and don't double guess it, unless you have evidence. Suppose archeologists found a church that used the term "Elect Lady" to refer to the church. Then you have historical evidence to back up a special use of the words "Elect Lady."

I suppose we could say that it doesn't matter. That's my position. You notice that when I write my commentaries, when I discuss what scholars have done, I tend to be wary of "clever interpretive models." They are sometimes too clever.

### **Tough Love and Hospitality**

**You interpret II John as giving a message of "tough love". Early Christians were open and hospitable at the risk of taking in unscrupulous individuals. Do you think that this is still a problem today?**

I think Christians need to be streetwise. Christians need to do due diligence, for example when buying a car from a Christian you still need to do due diligence. You still have to be a good steward of your money and just because a sales person is a Christian, doesn't mean you don't have to examine the details of the transaction. "Buyer beware and be street wise". It is true that in the first century church a number of Christians were being exploited by Christians who were traveling around the Roman world, they'd go to church, stay in a town, go to somebody's house and say, "I'm a Christian — can I stay in your house?" They'd stay in their house and sort of camp there.

Some of the hurricane Katrina victims did that. Some were even false victims and weren't even victims of the hurricane. Some may have also carried the moniker of being a "Christian."

One of the oldest Christian documents, not in the New Testament, was written about 120 A.D. It is called the Didache – a word for "teaching document." It's a very old Christian document.

The Didache is famous because it has a section on how to spot a "false prophet." A false prophet is identified as one who does false teaching; tries to borrow money from you; who stays in your house more than 3 days! That's where the saying comes from, "Guests like fish, smell after three days." That comes from the Didache. Don't let anyone stay in your house more than three days. Christians were being exploited by people traveling around the Roman world, taking advantage of the good will of Christians. You get a few hints of that in the New Testament.

## **Adult Children Moving Back Home**

**What do you say to the family of adult children who come back and move in?**

That same principle should hold. If we now have the kids returning to the nest, sometimes to get their Mom to do their laundry and they don't lift a finger and can sit around all day. This is not helping them. It's not helping them get on with their life, and a little tough love is needed there by the parents with their adult children. I heard a lecture at Rotary on transferred wealth. The speaker said you should never transfer any money to your children until they are 40 years old.

### **What about funds for their education?**

This lecturer worked with families in Beverly Hills, California. She said to support their education only if they're studying. Yesterday I had a talk with parents whose son is into drugs. He's a neat kid, but he is dealing drugs too. He is going to a college with a course design that is totally frivolous. He is not studying, he is just hanging out, and his parents are supporting him. I asked them, "Why are you supporting him for a frivolous education?" He is a bright kid. This kid is throwing his life away at school. He is taking meaningless courses and heaven admits it, and he is addicted to marijuana because he is using it every day. Why should they support him? Are they helping him by supporting him?

### **I hope this is a story like the prodigal son.**

I don't know. I hope so, but not yet. That youth is being supported in a way that is harming him. I would say that the Didache principle is a good principle, which Christians or members of a family should not be allowed to exploit.

### **What is your response to these men and women who stand on street corners carrying sign with begging messages, such as "need food for family" or "need money I'm hungry."**

I'm very skeptical of it. In times of dire unemployment, like during the depths of the great depression, many people were on street corners and many people were really hard-pressed. Society had to re-design its welfare system in order to help them. But when there are social services and employment opportunities, they can get a job. Seattle has food banks for the needy, and there should be no need to beg on the street. Some still would rather take that begging role with the public. I don't think it's helping them, and I don't think we should encourage that way of handling problems.

### **There have always been beggars and the Bible refers to beggars. How did Jesus respond to beggars?**

The classic story of Jesus healing a beggar is in Mark. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar who called out to Jesus to restore his sight. Jesus said,

*"Go, your faith has healed you." Mark 10:46-52)*

Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. A lot of beggars with disabilities were healed. When He does heal people with problems, like the adulterous woman, He meets her immediate need for safety and then tells her “go and sin no more.” He calls her to the way of righteousness.

There are things people want and things people need, and what they want is not always what they need. We do need to be skillful in knowing how to minister to peoples’ needs.

At UPC, we contribute to and help a lot of people, and contribute to the Food Bank, emergency aid funds, etc. and it’s wonderful.

We sent a number of teams to help rebuild the devastated homes damaged by hurricanes in New Orleans. We also send teams of volunteers to build homes for families in Mexico.

**What about the auction money? How is that spent?**

The auction money goes to mission projects of the youth ministry for their foreign and U.S.A. mission projects. This year it goes to build 14 houses in Mexico.

# III JOHN

## Hospitality ... Imitate Good

**Earl, what is the major message of III John, the third letter of John in the New Testament? The letter is certainly brief.**

III John is a letter to "Gaius," the most common of all names in the world of the New Testament writings. Summarizing the words of John in verses *III John 1:8-12*, John expresses thanks to those working together for the truth. He laments *Diotrephes*, "*who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us ... and is gossiping maliciously about us and refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*" Demetrius, on the other hand, is well spoken of by everyone.

*"Dear friend do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God."* (III John 1:11)

John ends his letter with,

*"Peace to you ... the friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name."* (III John 1:13)

**After all is said and done, what does III John really have to say to us as practicing Christians in the modern world?**

The book encourages respect between believers and long-term faithfulness.

# REVELATION

**Is the Book of Revelation written by John? There was a dispute that it was edited by others in the church in 95 A.D. What are your thoughts on this?**

## Curious & Colorful Language

The reason why there are a lot of questions about Revelation is because the language used in Revelation is very curious. You need a special lexicon for the unique language in the book. Many images and symbols are referenced there. I believe it's written by John. There is one whole school of thought that it was originally written in Aramaic by John, which would be his childhood language, and then translated into Greek by some other translator. There are many "John-like" expressions, pointing towards John as the author.

There is a lot of really obscure language in the Book of Revelation because it is "imagery language." It's like trying to explain ghosts or something you saw in a dream. You create a lot of unused words that would not be used anywhere else, and that's what's happening. Readers need to have a special lexicon to handle all of the vocabulary.

## Interpreting Speech Forms

**Is there much slang in the Bible? How does it relate to idiomatic speech or metaphors?**

There is "slang" in the Bible. English slang words that we use, like "No sweat!" in the New Testament Greek language might be translated as "So what?" That appears when Paul says, "Whether in pretense or in truth, I'm not going to worry about the gospel." Paul refuses to get bogged down in whether it is good or bad, so it is like he would say, "No sweat!" or "So what?" (Philippians 1)

We have a lot of those phrases. When Jesus' mother comes to him at the marriage of Cana and says, "They have no wine," he says in reply, "Oh woman, what to me to you?" That is considered a first century Aramaic saying which means, "So what? ... what am I to

do?" The translators don't know how to handle it, so they say, "Oh woman, what have I to do with you?" I believe Jesus was saying, "Okay, Mom, what do you want me to do?"

**I'm intrigued that in every language there appears to be the phrase, "So what?"**

I think you're right, and there are a lot of expressions meaning "so what?" Then, of course, when Jesus starts one of his parables, he says, "He who has ears to hear ..." This is obviously a slang expression for understanding, not just hearing. Slang is a shorthand language and that is why foreign speakers have so much trouble with slang, because we are using shorthand and we call such expressions "idiomatic." The best example is the Sports Page headline which you can imagine bewildering if you were from another country and did not know the slang meaning of: "Huskies smell roses after duck roast" This headline related to the University of Washington Huskies football win over the University of Oregon Ducks on the way to, hopefully later, playing in the Rose Bowl. Every sports fan in Washington would understand that, but someone from a different culture and time period might be bewildered by the slang.

Idiomatic speech is a problem when a foreign speaker uses English in a way that doesn't make sense. I had an Italian friend at McCloud who made fun of his Greek friend who was called Andy the Græek. My Italian friend said, "Oh Andy, he don't know hell of a much". My Italian friend didn't know English that well either, and he was making fun of Andy the Greek. My brother and I always laughed about "Andy the Greek who didn't know a hell of a much". A person, who does not know English very well himself, does not use idiomatic language very well. You spot the person as not a native speaker.

## Visual Imagery

**Visual imagery can be a common denominator that causes language idiosyncrasies. Jesus used imagery and stories, as do you and all good teachers, in my opinion.**

I've never used Power Point but I do use visualization and visual aids. In one of my lectures on Rembrandt I wanted to show some of

his paintings. I assembled slides of Rembrandt paintings, and when I gave the presentation every one of them was reversed – projected backwards. No one would notice unless they were a Rembrandt authority, but I knew it immediately. So I had a moment of truth – do I tell everybody that all of the pictures were reversed? Every one in the left side of the painting was on the right side.

### **What did you do?**

I figured I had to tell them. Here I am in the middle of my talk with all of these wonderful pictures, and the man who took them is sitting in the audience. He felt bad because he immediately knew they were backwards. So I did tell everyone.

**This shows that sometimes a message can be carried through even when the visual images are backwards!**

## **Calendar Concepts**

**One of the tools we use for visualization of time events is the calendar. Would you please remind us who established the calendar with years defined as B.C. and A.D.? Jesus could not have been born in the year “0.” Zero doesn’t exist in Roman numerals! It seems strange that Jesus lived his life “B.C.”! What sort of calendar was used during His time on earth? The exact “dates” of Jesus’ crucifixion and of his resurrection on Easter are not known since ancient records were different, often based on the number of years a king had reigned.**

Our present year reckoning was established by, Dionysius Exiguus, a Monk in the Catholic Church. Dionysius was assigned by the Pope to establish the correct day for Easter observances. Dionysius designated Jesus’ birth as 1 B.C. so that reckoning of history could be based on a count of His years starting one year later with 1 A.D. Subsequent studies place Jesus’ birth between 4 B.C. and 7 B.C.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII established what is known as the Gregorian calendar that was adopted by Catholic countries, but opposed by Protestant countries until 1752. The Soviet Union adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1918 and Greece accepted it in 1923.

In spite of the differences in calendars and arbitrary designations of decades, centuries and millennia, certain people have associated these time events with religious or cosmic events. And we know that there was no cosmic event in the New Years transition from 1999 to 2000 or 2000 to 2001 A.D.

**Clearly, man has struggled for centuries with dating events and years with different systems from China, Egypt, ancient Rome and the Muslims.**

## **The Apocalypse – End of the World?**

**This talk of “the end of the world” is one of the things I have trouble with in the Christian message. Somehow it doesn’t feel right to me.**

Apocalypse means, “hidden breakthrough.” Here’s what Paul says, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, for in it the righteous character of God has broken through.” The word he uses here is “apocalypse.” In **I Peter** the fire imagery that is spoken of is connected to birth images, not destruction. It is symbolic of the fact that it is all very dynamic, but it’s about a birth, a grand birth, so it’s birth language that is being used. Paul used fulfillment language in **Romans 8** and **I Corinthians 15** to describe the future destiny of the world.

**The Book of Revelation deals with the view that the apocalypse – the end of the world — is close at hand. It seems that each generation from “B.C.” onward has held this belief, as we have done in our own lifetime with awareness of nuclear weapons, massive natural disaster and various epidemics taken as signs. Do you believe there is a Biblical answer to the timing of the end of the world?**

No, I think it’s all in God’s hands. And I respect C. S. Lewis’ point, “*You might as well leave it in His hands because it’s there whether we leave it or not.*” Christ’s fulfillment will come “like a thief in the night.”

**Do you believe there is such a thing as the end of the world?**

Yes, I believe in the fulfillment of history. But even that's a mystery – how is God going to fulfill history? For each one of us individually – yes. But history itself, that's in his hands. But with timing – we are warned against it by the Bible. Our Lord uses a phrase and St. Paul also uses it, which is actually a non-calculable time, when he says, ***“I will come like a thief in the night.”*** You can't time a thief in the night. He is going to come when He is least expected – when He wants to come and there is no way to calculate the time. Consider the time wasted by Christian and prophetic writers with sermons and charts, and novels. It's not edifying to spend time trying to figure out when the world is going to end. When we do this, we don't get on with living our life meaningfully as Christ's servants here and now.

## **Suffering vs. God's Love**

**In the Book of Revelation do you see one principle point that comes through the book?**

Yes, in one sense, it is a very simple book, because it points out that there is real terror and danger in the world right now. It was written in a time when the people were suffering persecution, probably the Nero persecution.

Jesus Christ is the lamb who was slain and who has won the victory over death and sin and cosmic evil too. His power is greater than the powers that threaten us. He has the last word. And that is really the simple message of Revelation and it is repeated over and over again with symbolism.

Hans Lilji, a Lutheran Bishop, wrote a great commentary on the Book of Revelation while in a World War II German concentration camp. He said a beautiful thing. He said people who have suffered never play with the Book of Revelation. When you have suffered, the Book of Revelation is a book of comfort. Those who haven't suffered are tempted to speculate about Gog and Magog, Russians or Chinese in this Book of Revelation, or the European Common Market. When I think of the nonsense that is taught with regard to Revelation, trying to weave the Common Market or even Proctor & Gamble's image of the moon, as if even it is a devil image – or the fascination with the number 666 – all this has been a waste of time

for a lot of people. It has not been edifying. Always ask what is good for you to study? Do not follow those who have attempted to predict the timing of the apocalypse, and who makes such themes the central teaching point of their Bible studies.

**What conclusion would you like to have us take with us from our analysis of I John, II John, III John and the Book of Revelation?**

These books are helpful in encouraging us to accept the centrality of Christ and His faithfulness, trusting Him in whatever situation we are at in our life. The two great themes of I John are: God is light and God is love.

*And that event of the love of Jesus Christ's is so powerfully good that we can trust him.*

\* \* \* \*

## I, II & III John & Revelation

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does John mean by “light?” ... What do we mean by “I’ve seen the light?”
2. Do you have different images of God in the Old Testament compared to the New? How does Earl Palmer explain God’s consistency?
3. What does “Love is an event” mean? Give an example in the Bible and in your own life.
4. Do you think God’s judgments and punishments reported in the Old Testament are always fair? (e.g. punishment carried on to future generations)
5. How is God’s grace related to His judgment?
6. How do you feel today about the complex system of sacrifices and idols which were an integral part of pre-Christian worship? Do any parallels exist today?
7. What are some examples of idols, or near-idols, in your life?
8. What is the difference between an idol and a mentor?
9. When do you spell bible with a capital B?
10. How do you feel about limiting hospitality to three days?
11. What’s your view about adult children moving back with their parents?
12. How do you spot a “false prophet?”
13. How do you respond to beggars? ... Family? ... Friends? ... Fellow church members? ... Neighbors?
14. How do you respond to people suffering from war or natural disasters?
15. Do you have any examples of slang or “local speech” which could be misunderstood by future generations? Whatcha say, gang?
16. In what year was Jesus born?
17. Do you believe the world will come to an end? Will any end be predictable? How does this effect how you live?
18. How are you protected from the terror and danger in the world?

# LAUGHTER AND HUMOR

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# LAUGHTER & HUMOR

*“Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.”*

*Luke 6:21*

*Tears and laughter are often close to each other, whether from joy or sorrow. Laughter as an expression of joy is learned the first few months of life, and is a sign of health as well as a tool for healing throughout life.*

*Joyful laughter and a sense of humor are striking features of Earl Palmer. He blends humor into his sermons as well as his personal conversations. I recall an evening service at UPC in which he started by raising his arms triumphantly and saying, “Everyone stand.” We all stood. He then ceremoniously lowered his arms and said, “Be seated.” We all obeyed. He then smirked and laughed, saying facetiously, “See what power I have?” The congregation burst into appreciative laughter. Earl teaches Christianity academically and seriously, while keeping his sense of humor and perspective.*

**This chapter is based on passages from two of Earl Palmer’s books:**

***Laughter In Heaven and Other Surprising Truths in the Parables of Jesus***, published by Word Books copyright 1987.

***The Humor of Jesus, Sources of Laughter in the Bible***, published by Regent College Publishing copyright 2001.

## What is a “Sense of Humor”

Earl, your books on laughter and humor are not “joke books” or a “selection of funny stories.” We all have heard plenty of jokes but “humor” is a broader concept than joke telling. A “sense of humor” involves seeing the paradox or surprise in a particular story. Laughter often, but not always, occurs with the end of the story.

Your books are about subtle humor as found in the parables of, and stories about, Jesus. The realization at the end produces an

**“ah ha” more than a “ha ha” as the reader realizes the underlying meaning of the story.**

Yes, the stories and parables have humor with the same feature as jokes, namely a set-up followed by a surprise ending. I learned that from C. S. Lewis. He called it *“the sudden perception of incongruity.”*

**The parables usually come as a total surprise. The parable of the person who works all day versus the one only works half a day is an example. It is bitter sweet for the all-day workers until they think about it, but it is a sign of the generosity of the owner. It’s a wonderful surprise. There is a sense of comedy in that.**

There is a genuine sense of comedy and humor in them. For instance, when Jesus was asked, “Should you pay taxes?” Jesus answered with the question “Whose face is on the coin?” Their answer was, “Caesar.” Jesus’ replied,

*“Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.” (Matthew 22:21)*

That is not only witty and wise, it is also humorous. Also recall the reference to a camel going through the eye of a needle. There is a wonderful kind of comedy in it.

**In the shortest verse in the Bible, two words are recorded: “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35) Does it ever say, “Jesus laughed?”**

That’s a fair question. He is accused of laughing. At one point the Pharisees say that he eats and drinks with sinners, and remember that when Jesus answers that charge he reminds them, “You wouldn’t mourn with John the Baptist (who was very serious), and you won’t dance with me.” That admits that his demeanor was positive and upbeat, otherwise that his reply would make no sense.

**Do you think the early church – and even some churches today – treat religion so seriously that expressions of joy and laughter are forbidden? Is it possible that Jesus had more laughter and joy than has been recorded?**

Jesus Christ was healthy as a person. He wasn't a religious mystic. A broad cross-section of people who want to be with him. They want to meet with him. Also the Pharisees want to meet with him. Everybody wants to meet with him. We get that very clear picture in the gospel records. He is invited to a wedding in Cana. You don't invite someone who is severe to a wedding. And then he takes his disciples with him. That probably is why his mother scolded him and said, "They have no wine... You didn't bring a gift!" This sets the stage for the joyous miracle of water-to-wine. (*John 2*)

## **The Joy of Miracles**

**It seems to me there is a bit of humor in bringing twelve of your buddies along to a wedding and without bringing gifts! No wonder that his mother whines at his lack of consideration. It sounds to me like this was a case of "A miracle or else."**

### **Speaking of miracles, what about walking on water?**

It's a miracle of joy. It is a completely fun event. You can't describe it as a miracle of compassion. The disciples were discouraged and confused and Jesus walks out on the water and meets them. Peter tries to walk on the water, and it becomes a hilarious event. At first they were frightened, and then the Bible says, "They were glad," and that is the word for laughter. They laughed when he came into the boat.

The feeding of the five thousand is another warm and expansive story showing the humor of Jesus.

*"... and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

*Philip answered him, "eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish but how far will they go among so many?"*

*Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.*

*When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

*After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself." John 6:2-15*

The way this feast happens, starting with a boy's lunch, is portrayed in a joyous, upbeat way.

I certainly can see the humor in Jesus amazing his disciples through this miracle, and having food left over at the end! This was a very practical "practical joke."

All of these events portrayed joy with which we associate laughter, even though it is not explicitly described within each story.

What about the events of Holy Week?

## **Humor and the Holy Week**

It's true; Holy Week is the most moving and profound week of all time. It starts with sheer **joy** on Palm Sunday. Then because of the fear and the anger of those that oppose Jesus, a conspiracy jells against him. Then, of course, the rest of the holy week is not humorous. There are, however, elements of humor in the resurrection narratives.

Consider the account of The Road to Emmaus ... I love that scene as one of the great resurrection accounts, and Rembrandt is the one who captured it on canvas. Jesus joins up with two men

who are walking away from the event. He goes to have dinner with them and while he is eating with them, their eyes are opened and they realize who he is. And there is a kind of amazing **joy**. And again, the same word is used, when he met with the disciples in the upper room, “They were glad when they saw him” — that is again the word for laughter.

## **Joy and Seriousness**

**In the present day, some churches abound in laughter and joy in their music and messages. How do you try to balance seriousness with silliness (humor) at UPC and in your own life?**

Your life should be antiphonal and worship should be a mixture of joy and solemnity when we ponder the sacrifice of Christ – and triumph, too! Yet, look – the Lord’s Supper is called the Eucharist – it’s called the Thanksgiving. It’s a joyous event that we celebrate until Christ comes again. It’s a celebration of victory and yet it is solemn because we are contemplating the cost that Jesus paid to win our salvation. In Christian worship we always want the mixture of the joy of adoration with the realistic understanding of who we are, with the confession of our sins.

But notice – in Christian worship, we don’t start with confession, we start with adoration first. Then we confess our sins. First we contemplate the love of Christ for us, and then it sets us free to confess our sins, which is solemn. And then in worship we listen to his Word in reading of texts, anthems and sermon.

**You think it’s also appropriate in sermons that there be laughter and joy as well as tears?**

Oh yes, I definitely do, because the sermon should speak to the whole of life in the light of the gospel. We are not without hope.

**Jesus tells us there is joyful laughter in heaven because of one single sinner who repents. (Luke 15:3-7)**

## **Surprise in Humor**

**We’ve already noted that surprise is a key element of humor. Jesus’ openness and friendship towards sinners was one of the**

surprises he created for observers and his disciples. Rather than confronting his critics with argument and anger, he told gentle stories – parables – that made his point. He tells the parable of the one sheep that is lost in the woods and then is found by his owner, who says to his neighbors,

*“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”*  
Jesus continues, *“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Matthew 18:12-14)*

We are surprised by the priority of the shepherd who would leave ninety-nine sheep unattended in order to seek the one who was lost. (Luke 15:3-7) Jesus gives the same message in the parable of the woman who loses one of her ten silver coins and calls for celebration when she finds the coin that was lost. Jesus notes that there is joy among the angels in Heaven over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:8-10) The third parable in the “lost and found” triad is the story of the lost son. The father answers his son who is jealous about the joyous celebration when the lost son returns,

*“It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.”*  
(Luke 15:11-32)

The “lostness” in this case is a spiritual rather than a location problem, as it was in the first two parables.

I confess my own distress when I lost my wallet about six months ago. When I found it, while vacuuming my car the other day, my response was one of joy and laughter! Joy produces laughter, perhaps due to the surprise of sudden happiness.

## **Holy Hilarity and Humor Aikido**

I am reminded of the concert of “Holy Hilarity” which comes from Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center on Lake Chelan in Washington. Joy and laughter pervade the Christian message, open to all, at Holden Village.

In addition to the concept of “Holy Hilarity”- finding joy and laughter in the Christian experience –there is a useful skill termed “Humor Aikido.” This came to me via Joel Goodman’s

***Humor Project* at one of their annual Humor Conferences (*Go to www.HumorProject.com*) Joel’s program introduced me to the concept of “Humor Aikido” in which one meets aggression with gentle humor and understanding rather than equal hostility. This is a skill learned more from mentors than from messages. Humor aikido is perfectly portrayed in Jesus’ use of parables. You illustrate this humor skill in Jesus and in your own life – which is one of the reasons your sermons and communications are so effective.**

**I heard an example of Humor aikido on the radio the other day. A talk show host had received a number of angry letters about his opinion on a certain subject. Rather than attacking his critics, he simply gave their names and read their criticisms on the air for others to judge. It seemed funny that he made no attempt to answer these criticisms or to defend himself for his other listeners.**

**I think that Jesus used a similar technique of “Humor Aikido” as in the parable where he said, “Let anyone who is without sin throw the first stone” as he stayed with the accused woman.**

## **“Debts” vs. “Trespases”**

**How do the two parables relating to forgiveness of debts (meaning monetary obligations) carry forth in the message in the Lord’s prayer, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors?” Does the translation where “trespases” is used instead of “debts” make a major difference in the meaning of the prayer?**

**Either one is a legitimate translation, but I prefer the word “trespases” for our church.**

**A Christian who leads a joyful, laughter-filled life is obviously a better mentor and evangelist than a brilliant, threatening grouch. In your book you discuss why conversion to faith by force and fear is not a lasting conversion. You state that Jesus makes it clear to us that he has no intention of staging such conversions. He does not want to use “Miracles on Demand” as**

**a method of converting people to the faith he is teaching. His goal is a conversion that comes as we make the discovery of faith in Jesus Christ. Conversion does not come from frightful persuasiveness. Jesus instead advocates a slower way to Christian conversion, majority, and personal growth.**

**Question: How do you interpret the story of the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus?**

Jesus' tells the story of a rich man" and of Lazarus, who was a poor man. After the death of each, the rich man was punished in fire while Lazarus was comforted. The rich man asked father Abraham to send him (the rich man) back to warn the rich man's five brothers. Abraham said, *"They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them"* and The rich man said, *"No [father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent."* Abraham responded, *"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."* (Luke 16: 19-31)

In this parable Jesus makes it clear that the Laws of the Old Testament (Moses and the prophets) faithfully prepare the way for every person to discover God's will for life.

## **New Covenant as fulfillment of Old Laws**

Jesus implies that the good news, which he brings in the New Covenant, is a fulfillment rather than a denial of the Laws. The parable also teaches the necessity of human choice about the Word of God based on ordinary life journeys.

I have seen for myself the truth of this parable that Jesus taught. It is accurate psychologically and spiritually. People today believe in Christ because of their discovery of the integrity and love of the man Jesus Christ. He wins our respect and finally we are persuaded to trust in his promises.

## **A Time to Believe**

Jesus' parable of sowing the seeds on various types of ground (Matthew 13:3-8) relates to your parable of entering college students who, prior to being in any class, had no interest in a seminar entitled, "What To Do if You Have Academic Difficulty." You observe, "There is no discovery until the time is

### SECTION III – LAUGHTER AND HUMOR

**right.” The question is how do you tell when the time is right? You observe that different seeds respond to different conditions. The mighty Ponderosa Pine struggles against weeds and bushes until it grows beyond them.**

Likewise, it takes time for the Word of God to grow in a life. It needs attention in its early days, but in time it grows. The gospel, like the pine, when it is not overcome by weeds in its early growth, rises to a higher level. In our own life, clutter represents weeds that can smother out long-term growth. Also, hardened soil must be loosened enough to allow the good seed to start its journey. Jesus of Nazareth was a master at communicating with hardened people – at “softening their soil.” I’m interested in the story in modern times of the conversion of “rock-like cynic” Malcolm Muggeridge whose book *“Jesus Rediscovered”* tells of the series of softening experiences that opened him to God.

My own feeling is that hardened people, when they finally open up to the love and trustworthiness of Jesus Christ, make very good Christians. There must be a special sort of laughter in heaven at their entry into the family.

**You also comment that the moment is right for growth when the soil is deep.**

The problem with shallow soil is that real growing must take place beneath the ground surface as much as above it. It is no secret that, as shallow soil is a threat for a tree, superficiality is a persistent problem in all human relationships. And for many, it has become a studied, state-of-the-art skill.

Spiritually, what is required is a strong emphasis upon experiences that move toward depth. Some people are caught in what might be called a kind of “ideological wonderlust.” They tinker too much with the plants and transplant them too much. The “potential” great tree is at first dwarfed by the planter box in which it is rooted. Depth comes with time and continuity in the right soil and conditions. Jesus’ parable calls us to the soil that can produce the healthy tree with its great potential...

**Earl, that is beautifully expressed! Here's a poem I've written inspired by you:**

## **A TREE PRAYER**

*Thank you, God, for rain and the sun above. Roots  
nourished by Christ, the source of love.*

*And love it is, with Nature's toil  
That grew my seed through hardened soil.  
Thanks for clearing the weeds and vines  
Allowing more leaves and shade as signs.  
Thy whispering wind that blows through my leaves  
Has brought me a faith that truly believes.  
And though there are bends in my personal growth,  
I've grown towards the sky,  
Loving you, God, and now knowing why.*

**Stephen R. Yarnall, 2006**

**The language of the Bible is poetic and the poetic images of the biblical texts carry through in different languages and translations.**

Poetry has always attracted me as a special way of communicating. Except for the characters in Shakespeare's works, people usually speak in prose and daily discourse. The language of the Bible is poetic...and the poetic images of the Biblical texts carry through in different languages and translations.

**There is a parable discussed in your book of the father who asked his two sons to help him in the vineyard. One son said he would not, but then changed his mind and did help. The other son said he would, but then didn't show up for work. Jesus notes that the one who changed his mind and went to work was worthy of respect while the other, who failed to follow through on his promise to work was more at fault.**

## **Faith Benefits From Critical Examination**

C. S. Lewis wrote that *“second thoughts are better than first thoughts.”* .... *“Faith actually benefits from the stormy, honest, vigorous examination of every possibility.”* The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not obvious at first, but works into our minds through unexpected channels.

**Where do you see the laughter in heaven in this parable? I am reminded of the witty observation that, *“The early bird gets the worm – but the second mouse gets the cheese!”***

**I can see some “dark humor” in the way people reacted to Jesus’ teaching about Himself as the only gate “for the sheep.” The dark humor is that most of the people charged Him as being insane. It is “funny” that Jesus, like many intellectuals throughout history, is “ahead of His time” and classified as mad. Through parables Jesus is giving new messages that many people are not yet prepared to hear.**

**You, yourself, Earl, are a master of story telling. Your book, “Laughter In Heaven” brings to life Jesus’ parables with current images and your own stories.**

The parable of the servants given ten minas (equal to three months wages) indicates that God expects us to invest wisely the gifts we have been given.

## **Keeping A Clear Mind For Decisions**

We are expected to keep our minds clear so that we are not confused and self-preoccupied when moments of decision come. Our generation is in danger of becoming a drugged society controlled by forgetfulness and fear, just at the very time when we need clarity and realism. I do not want to fog my brain since my brain is the only means I have for deciding, and all my life is involved in decisions ... I want to be able to relate, and laugh and love with a mind that is not blurred.

I also want to invest the mind that God has given to me. I know He will ask what has happened to it. The reward to the faithful is

more responsibility and the joy of hearing, **“Well done”** from the Lord of the kingdom.

**I love your story of a good football player who works very hard in spring practice in order to earn more than, “Well done” words of approval by his coach.**

The reward a football player wants to hear more than any other is that he will be on the starting team in the fall. There is an incongruity where a young athlete works very hard in practice so that he will be rewarded with the chance to work even harder in the fall on Saturday afternoons. No one wants to hear a coach say, “Well Palmer, you have been such a hard worker at our practice sessions that I am going to reward you with a little well earned rest this weekend at game time. You deserve it, believe me! This way you can watch the student rooting section, card stunts, the marching band and have time to enjoy the game without the terrible stresses that go on out on the field. Congratulations, young man, you have earned this rest!!!” What kind of speech is that? No football player wants to hear such a speech, yet many of us tell ourselves that we have too much stress that we need to get away from, along with intense responsibility. We need relief from bad stress not from good stress. We need all of the good stress that we can take ...Of course; we need it one Saturday at a time!

**A saying that I am fond of is, “Be thankful for the problems of your job – without them you would be replaced by someone at a lower salary!” To a large extent we are paid for the amount of stress we must handle in our work. Those persons who have learned how to manage stress avoid the ill health consequences of high-level stress, and are a lot more fun to work with. A strong religious base is one of the best stress managers. Laughter on earth, as well as laughter in heaven, is a great stress reliever.**

**Well, Freud alleged that stress had to do with sex and, Ogden Nash observed that, “Everything is concave or convex – therefore, has to do with sex.” Hans Selye became the guru of the stress response, and during the early part of the last century much medical management focused on stress control. The focus on**

### SECTION III – LAUGHTER AND HUMOR

stress went so far as to justify cigarette smoking as helpful for stress relief and therefore good for health! As a result of this belief, millions of cigarettes were passed out to our military troops during World War II, and it has been said that more of our troops died due to cigarette smoking than due to hostile enemy actions. The American Medical Association went so far as to state, in 1948, that although cigarette smoking may be harmful to your health in some ways, it's benefit for relieving stress more than justified the use of cigarettes. I recall in my training days in the 1960's, that patients were allowed to smoke in bed while in the hospital. In fact, one of my patients had lit up a cigarette while in an oxygen tent (a relic of the past). His chief complaint was, "My cigarettes burn too fast!"

Herbert Benson (who was in training with me in the 1960's) wrote a popular book on relaxation techniques to handle stress. At first I thought that this was ironic because Herb always had appeared to be very tense as he chewed on the stem of his pipe. Perhaps his own tension led him to change and write his best selling book, "*The Relaxation Response.*"

Over the years many people, more than humor writers, actors, comedians and clowns, have provided stress reduction through humor – one of the most cost-effective therapies ever known!

Hopefully, not only pastors and physicians will develop their HQ (humor quotient) more fully, but everyone facing stresses in their individual lives, relationships and jobs will find life a bit easier with a good spiritual life, including the important components of humor and laughter.

It is gratifying to see humor playing an important role in modern day churches in contrast to the "hell fire and damnation" focus of some earlier churches. One of the things I like about UPC, your church, Earl, is the incorporation of personal anecdotes and humor in your services of worship.

**I think we can end by agreeing that there is laughter in heaven and that Jesus has a sense of humor. I would wish that all pastors would use more humor and laughter as tools for presenting the message of Christianity.**

***May God bless each of us with His joy  
and gifts of laughter and humor.***

# Laughter and Humor

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*These questions are offered for individual meditation and/or small group discussion related to Earl Palmer's books on Laughter and Humor.*

1. What would you say about your own "sense of humor"?  
About how many times a day do you laugh? Do you know how this compares to how often a baby laughs?
2. Do you find humor in your religion?
3. How would you describe Earl Palmer's view of humor in the Bible?
4. Do you see humor in Jesus' Miracles?
5. Can you describe any experiences of "holy hilarity" in your religious voyage?
6. Can you give any examples of where you might have used humor Aikido to get out of a difficult situation?
7. In the Lord's Prayer, do you prefer "Debts" or "Trespases"?
8. Do you believe humor is a useful tool when you wish to communicate the meaning of Christianity to a non-believer? Give examples.
9. What does "the second mouse gets the cheese" mean to you?
10. Does humor help you handle stress?
11. Share any jokes you feel are appropriate regarding religious topics.
12. Would you like to see more humor incorporated in sermons?
13. Have you really read this far in this book or did you just randomly turn to this page?

# "MURDER IN MANILA"

EARL F. PALMER

Unpublished fiction

*Earl Palmer reads a wide scope of literature and has a sense of drama in his writing and his speaking. His sermons are given from notes rather than full written scripts and this allows him to improvise and include dramatic personal stories. He is also a poet and examples of his poetry are included in the first section of this book. Interestingly, he has written a "thriller" which he finished in 2003 but has not submitted it to a publisher. He had no title for the manuscript and was kind enough to ask me to suggest a title for his unpublished book, which is a 575-typed pages long. I feel the title, "Murder in Manila" suggests some of the intrigue and suspense of his book.*

The following is a review I wrote for Earl's use and to serve as a stimulus for publishing this exciting story.

*Manuscript review of Earl Palmer's book:*  
**MURDER IN MANILA**

There's much more than murder and love stories in *Murder in Manila*". In this action-packed thriller, set in 1975 in the Philippine Islands, you will join Banjoe and the other characters in this intrigue, trying to figure out who to trust and who to fear – What and where is the treasure worth all the killing?

Palmer has a concise, terse style that presents violent and romantic scenes with an economy of words, leaving much to your imagination. Likewise, the parts that portray problem-solving exchanges or introduction of new characters (there are many) are brief and relevant.

### SECTION III – “MURDER IN MANILA”

**Details, such as hotel, street and restaurant descriptions make you feel you are there. (Earl Palmer lived in Manila for seven years.) References to the FBI and World War II military leaders from the Nazis, Japanese and Americans bring memories to some and history to others. Likewise, the scenes in Berkeley are those Palmer knew when he was there for a number of years.**

**Places and people are tied together so graphically that you can see this book becoming a thrilling movie after a run as a best-seller which you'll find hard to put down.**

Steve, your review is neat and really touching. Was there a character that you kind of liked the best?

#### **Probably Banjoe.**

I liked him the best. He was kind of an open faced young person and I love his grandmother, Yolando. You know I was writing this for the fun of it. I had an original idea that I knew I was going for, and I did not waiver from the original idea, in terms of the two possible treasures that these people are after. I was aiming for that, but then the characters began to come in, and then I didn't know what to do with some of them, so I arranged for some murders of characters.

**That's why you describe the murders – this terminates the readers' relationship with that character.**

That's right, but when one of the murders occurred, like one young man I had murdered in the Durant Hotel, I then realized that I kind of liked this guy, so decided I'd have that as a fake murder. Because I wanted to keep him alive and bring him back in later in the story.

**You do a lot of things that have a twist to them like that.**

I kind of take you by surprise at the end with the villain. You keep wondering who he is when everyone is terrified of him.

A lot of the story is true ... things I learned while living in Manila and I've been to the very deep mines and met the President of these gold and copper mines.

What started the story in my mind was that during all the years I was in Manila, there was always the rumor in the Philippines and still is, of “where is Yamashita’s gold?” General Yamashita was a real person and a lot of people have wondered what did the Japanese do with all the gold that they took out of the mines, when they occupied the Philippines and operated the mines. Probably all of the gold went back to Japan, but there was always the rumor in the Philippines that it was stashed away somewhere. Many Filipinos have been searching for Yamashita’s gold.

Then I added some fiction about the Germans. Originally I was going to write a story about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and then decided, why not get the Germans in the book, too, connected to Nazis in America. So I decided to build the mystery of a group of very wealthy people who are trying to find the Philippine treasure plus a German treasure.

**I thought it was concisely described when a beautiful woman made an appearance and was noticed by one of the guys. A few words later you write that he woke up in the morning, “a happy man”. This scene was discretely handled.**

It means a lot to me that you took the time to read my novel. Wow!

**I couldn’t stop reading it once I started it. It held my attention. In fact I was sort of frustrated because it was so long, and I couldn’t stop reading it!**

The chapters are short. I learned that from a good writer, John Grisham and also Robert Ludlum in “*The Bourne Identity*”. I like him, and of course Herman Wouks is the best in “*Winds of War.*” He’d be my hero as a writer of historical novel-type murder mysteries.

**I’ve actually read very few mysteries in my life. After college, like a square, I’ve read mostly medical literature.**

When it comes to substantial mysteries, I do think Ludlum’s “*The Bourne Identity*” and “*The Bourne Supremacy*” were fine books. Herman Wouk’s “*Winds of War*” and “*War of Remembrance*” and those were made into films. I thought “*Winds*

### SECTION III – “MURDER IN MANILA”

*of War*” was the best. He wrote beautiful, beautiful books including “*Marjorie Morningstar*”.

**Your book was very realistic and exciting in Karate scenes.**

I had these two boys who grew up in Manila together and learned Karate, which turned out to be life saving on two occasions. I had to put my schools in the story. One went to Stanford and the other one went to Cal at Berkeley.

**That made it a good story because you knew the streets and the dorms, and it was realistic.**

**When did you write the novel “*Murder in Manila*”?**

I wrote it about 3 or 4 years ago, but haven’t worked on it for about 2 years.

**Why have you not published it?**

I just got other things going. I wrote it for the fun of it, and then went to the trouble to get it edited but then let it sit. Only a few people have read it, and you are one of the very few.

**I was wondering if you held back publication because you thought a pastor should not be writing murder mysteries.**

No, nothing like that. In fact, I want to write another story too. I have another idea for a story I want to write.

**Good. You are a very productive man.**

Writing is fun. When you once get going on it, like when I got going on this story, as Shirley will tell you, I was writing on it all the time. I wrote a lot on airplanes and when we went to London, and she was out shopping with her friend, I was writing in a hotel bar that was the only place I had a table, you know!

**That’s funny. You must have had trouble keeping the characters straight yourself.**

That’s true. After awhile you think to yourself, “What have I done with that character?”

**I wondered if Frank Martin in the story was your secret autograph.**

I like him, but I didn't really like him strongly.

**He looked like he was going to be a central figure early in the book.**

In a way, you begin to wonder and begin to get suspicious of him for a little while.

**Yes, I was suspicious of everybody, particularly the women.**

The Counsel General's wife is really seductive — very seductive.

**She is the one who took two people – one right after the other?**

Yes, she is very seductive, but then she is not all bad.

**No, she had the modern ethic.**

She's a modernist, for sure.

**WELL! When you DO publish this book I am certain it will be a best seller. I visualize a cover design including a Japanese Sun and a German Swastika that would catch the eye of World War II buffs and symbolize the conspiracy in your story. I urge readers of the *Dialogues with Earl Palmer* book to check the bookstores and send you a letter if "*Murder in Manila*" is not already published (under whatever name.) The pressure is on, Earl!**

# TRUSTING GOD

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# TRUSTING GOD

## (Christian Faith In a World of Uncertainty)

*This dialogue is based on Earl's latest published book. I reviewed the manuscript in the galley proof of stage. At that time he was debating whether the title should be "Trusting God" or "Trust God". I like either one, but see subtle differences. "Trusting God" points to a description of a relationship with God which is our choice. "Trust God" sounds like an admonition, to be followed "or else!" The more I think of it, the more I favor the gentler choice, which is the chosen title of the book... "Trusting God" deals with faith and doubting, as we discuss in the following dialogue.*

### **What is different about this book from your other books?**

Before writing *Trusting God* I had done a lot of thinking about the different kinds of faith and doubt – especially faith when there is also doubt – doubt and faith together. That's what I do in this book. I wanted to create the idea of lag time – the fact that there can be a time of doubt in the freedom theology of the Bible. Jesus Christ does not corner people. They are given time to decide and I wanted to preserve that in this book.

**You did a good job! One of the things that strikes me about you, Dale Turner, and other people who have been my mentors, is that you arrived at your commitment as a young adult, such as you did in college in the Bible study group.**

You want people to have faith as long as possible, so you are grateful when children have a journey of faith from the earliest of time. On the other hand, the advantage of making a discovery of faith when you are a bit older is that you have had some experiences that allow you to trust in Jesus Christ while being aware of other points of view. Faith is tested from the very early part of the journey.

Because faith is a part of your whole life you will be tested. It makes no difference when you come to faith, there will be a time when it is tested.

## **Faith Is a Choice**

**I love the word faith because it implies a decision. It implies a belief based on something more than just teachings of our parents or beliefs that require solid-as-a-rock scientific evidence. Faith is something that is a choice.**

Pascal called faith a “wager” on the character of God.

**I like that approach because I am still troubled by absolutes in anything. History is the story of change. I’ve seen many changes in the medical establishment. We also see changes in church practices.**

One thing I thought about on this score is that there is no absolute faith. Faith is always relative, depending on how well I know myself and how much I have discovered about Christ. God is absolute but my faith is never absolute. Even such a strong faith statement as the Apostles Creed does not start with, “This is the last word.” It starts with, “I believe,” which means that this is what I have come to believe but it doesn’t mean that this is the last word. Only God has the last word. My faith will always be what I have discovered now. I build on what I have now discovered.

**One of the things that you brought out is that Christianity came as a monotheistic religion that challenged polytheism with many Gods. Here is a religion that came out and said, “There is one God,” yet some of the forms of Christianity seem to carry on some of the polytheistic tendencies, like canonizing the virgin Mary and splitting God into three parts.**

## **Trinitarian Faith & “other gods”**

Trinitarian faith is not seeing God as divided into three parts. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is that within the oneness of God there is fellowship of love within God’s essence. That’s how I understand Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. I don’t see it as three gods or as a deterioration of pure monotheism into three parts. There is one God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**I see the Trinitarian concept as coming out of a tradition of polytheism. For example, the Bible says,**

***“There are no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)***

**If God is saying there are no other gods before, that implies a number of gods that come after.**

Lesser gods.... demagogues.

**It strikes me that many religions behave as if there were other gods to worship.**

That's idolatry of course! In fact, Paul says that to the Thessalonians. He says, *“You left your gods behind when you discovered God speaking for himself.”* That's how I understand the Holy Trinity. He is one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He makes himself known in his son Jesus Christ and continues to make himself known by the Holy Spirit, but God is one God.

**In fact, these other gods are treated as real.**

They certainly are treated that way – Baal was treated as real but they don't have a reality. The word for idol means projecting a meaning on something that it doesn't have in itself.

**There seems to be a discrepancy in my own faith and in Christianity in general. We use the words, “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords” as if we are still hanging onto our ancient beliefs that there is more than one king or one lord. It always has struck me that there is only one God! There is no “Sun god” or god of other things, as worshiped in primitive cultures.**

The Bible agrees,

***“Thou shalt not make any graven image” (Exodus 10:4 KJ)*** of anything in heaven or on earth. We are to steward the earth and to honor it as God's creation, but we should not worship anything in the created order.

## **Language Expresses Imagery**

**But then what do we do with God? We make God into a god that we can see, that has a right hand, that has a place in heaven, who is served by angels.**

Yes, we use imagery because we can't think without images. Language itself is created by imagery within our minds.

**I guess I'm used to mathematical science of thinking without images, but really not entirely. I think of electrons with an image of a particle, yet they are really fields of force around atoms.**

In other words, in order to find the language to express a reality, we need to create imagery. When language is created it creates imagery within the language. The language itself is imagery ... like your illustration of the right hand of God as being the authority of God. Or when Jesus is called the first born, it doesn't mean the first born in birth order but the first born in sense of rank and stature.

## **One Wonders**

**Many people seem to believe in heaven as a place and say, "I'll see you there." It's something about which I am content to be agnostic, since I don't really know.**

I think that's a good position, or to use Karl Barth's great line, "*One wonders!*" Because who knows? What we find in the book of Revelation is imagery and heaven shouldn't be treated as if it can be located with a precise definition. But it is imagery referring to "a tree in the middle of a garden," or Jesus Christ on a white horse. All of this is imagery that makes us wonder.

**The Garden of Eden itself, by the way, seems to me as imagery. There wasn't really a garden and an apple and there wasn't a serpent.**

When we interpret a great text we need to be careful not to ask the wrong question of it. It is symbolic language when Genesis says that God put two Cherubim with flaming swords at the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. If we were to literalize that text then we ought to be able to find two flaming swords at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. Moses is writing the chapter of Genesis in a saga form and we need to let him do that. I think it is important that we allow that to happen in the Bible.

**I agree. It seems to me you can take more meaning from it rather than less when you don't take the Bible literally but rather as a saga.**

In early Genesis we have a picture of goodness in creation, of dominion, of limits, of alienation, with a picture of heartbreak, and a picture of temptation. Rich imagery is used to express these realities, but if we say, "This is literal and exactly what happened," I think we miss the chance of listening to what the serpent says while trying to figure out what he looked like.

**As you like to do, you start your book with a scripture. *Matthew 21:28-32* relates the Parable in which Jesus told about two brothers and their reaction to the request to work in the vineyard. The first son initially declines but then shows up for work and is favored over the second son who initially agrees to work but then doesn't show up. You note that an honest family argument at least causes people to get to know what each person is like and what each one thinks. The second son illustrates the problem of agreeing to something and then not doing it. The first son illustrates faith in the will of the father by changing his mind and doing his will.**

## **Faith Is Our Response to Evidence**

**As they say, "*The early bird gets the worm*" ... (But the second mouse gets the cheese.)**

**C. S. Lewis says, "*Second thoughts are better than first thoughts.*" Do you think Lewis' statement is always true?**

What I think Lewis means is that the Gospel wears well over the long haul. The more we think it over, the more the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes sense.

**You say that trusting in God – faith in God — benefits from stormy, honest and vigorous examination. What do you mean by stormy?**

I mean that the stresses of vigorous dialogue and even controversy can often be helpful in testing grand themes and truths.

**I like your comment, “*the parable teaches us that it is better to finally believe what at first you cannot say, than to say at first what you don’t believe.*” You speak to me when you say: “*Faith in God is not meant to be a simple matter, and the parable of the two sons makes that fact clear ... Jesus himself preserves for us the lag time needed between hearing the call to discipleship and our decision to actually trust the Lord.*”**

**I know you came to Christ when you were no longer a child, and don’t you think this tends to create a deeper commitment than folks that just accept their faith as a gift from their parents during their childhood?**

No, I have seen profoundly deep faith in people who always lived with faith as a vital ingredient in their lives.

**Faith is strongest when it makes sense to the thinking part of our brain. This can occur at any age. Faith combined with logical thinking is the basis for Christian belief and action.**

**You state, “*Faith is our response to evidence – it is our response to the evidence we discover of God’s trustworthiness – God’s faithfulness deserves our faith.*” Then you say that the greatest creeds of Christian faith have always focused primarily upon the source of faith itself, rather than upon the means of faith. I’m not sure I understand this. Would you please explain it?**

I heard that quote from Barth in his commentary on the Apostles Creed. Barth cautions us not to see faith as an art form because this would put our focus on the dynamics of believing instead of ..who it is we trust. Our skills in believing would then be more important than the truth that wins our belief.

## **Personal Conflicts**

**You bring faith into real life when you discuss the conflict between a man and woman who are having marital disagreements. You note that they need input that is not tied to their problem and some theological group may help with their problem. You urged them to read the Bible together, worship God together, and find the sources of hope before trying to find**

**solutions to their problems. What is the general outcome when you give this advice? What if one partner is not interested?**

I usually advise couples in stress with each other to look not only at each other...but together look at another focus point. This can help each to see what the other is seeing and this begins a journey toward interpersonal healing. It also helps them to really hear what each is saying.

## **Faith Is a Freedom Word**

**In your third chapter you state, “Faith is a freedom word.” We are free to choose for or against God’s will. You note that we should consider “the subjective nature of faith” ... “Faith in the Bible not only has to do with it’s source and object, it also has to do with the mind, the heart and the will of the person who believes and doubts and wonders why... It takes time to believe (with a lot of trying out of options and examination of evidence) ... before we are able to trust ... in the promises of God.” Is that true even for believers that they still have to re-examine the basic questions?**

Yes, we are always growing in our faith just as we grow in grace.

**I know you are a fan of C. S. Lewis and you quote his words about grief: “Crying is alright, in a way, as long as it lasts, but you have to stop sooner or later and then you have to decide what to do.” You also talk about hearing and ask, “What does it mean to say, I hear you!” I like Yogi Berra’s aphorism, “The more I listen, the more I see.”**

I like both sentiments.

**In the pursuit of faith you state, “Because the consciousness of the individual search for meaning and fulfillment in life is different for every person, each person looks at evidence from a different angle.” Could we say ... Different strokes for different folks?**

Yes.

## **A Single God & The Love of Jesus**

**You relate that Paul shared stories that made sense to people. A single God made more sense to them than many idols from Greek and Roman myths.**

In Paul's time there was already a fatigue that had settled in on many in the Greek world who were weary of the many deities and longed to hear of the God who speaks for himself. They were prepared for Paul.

**You describe your experience of discovering that, “*The love of Jesus is also for me.*” You discovered that Love is not a theory or altruism or benevolent kindness in the abstract ... love is the event by which God acted toward us within our actual history.**

**How did you come to have faith in and experience the love of Jesus for yourself?**

For me the discovery that God's Love was “also for me” came in stages. First, early in my childhood from my parents, then in early years from a Sunday School teacher, Mr. D. U. Birch, and then it came together with the larger wholeness in college during my sophomore year.

## **Seeking Truth**

**You state that, “*There is a built-in alliance between the Lord of truth and every truth and that when we believe in Jesus Christ we have a mandate to search for truth in every field of human exploration.*” How do you apply this to proposals for stem cell research and cloning?**

I believe the Lord of truth wants us to pursue truth and that invites us into the whole world of science. There are no advantages to ignorance. The truth we learn we are then commissioned by God to steward wisely.

**I like your discussion about the dynamic nature of faith in it's glory and in it's crisis. I also appreciate your allegation that faith is not absolute, only God is absolute ... “*Faith is a freedom journey*”.**

Our faith should always be testable and therefore growing, because our faith is not absolute. We don't capture Christ with our faith statements. Our freedom, which is real, does not cancel God's freedom.

## **Faith Is a Journey, Not an Act**

**“Trusting in the evidence of the truth and trusting in the love of God is a journey more than it is a single act.”**

Yes ... and a life- long journey.

**You also note your faith has assurance from tradition and many influential people. You indicate that you have been influenced by the faith of St. Augustine, St. Paul, Pascal, and the stormy faith of Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I must say that I, too, have been encouraged by mentors such as these knowledgeable people, and inspired by mentors such as yourself. I like the word “mentor”. These heroes of faith and guides of faith keep us on the journey more than they dominate our journey.**

## **How a Kite Flies High**

**Your image of a kite flying high but needing a string connecting it to the solid point near the ground is a good image of the connection of lofty ideals with firmly rooted control. Would you comment on the kite and balloon poems in your book?**

The poems all grew out of an illustration I gave about a kite, held by its string to the flyer on the ground. My main point is that we gain our greatest freedom as we are bound to Truth that holds us. The poems come from people stirred by the illustration. As we know and trust His truth we are then the freest.

**Over a quarter of “*Trusting God*” has to do with “*doubting God*”. The stories of Job, Jonah, and John the Baptist, Thomas and others tell of doubt.**

**“*Father, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Mark 15:34)**

**Do the words of Jesus on the cross, express doubt by Jesus himself?**

### SECTION III – TRUSTING IN GOD

Everything is dependent on the word “why”. Jesus quotes David’s hurting prayer of Psalm 22 as a prayer to his Father in the hours of his suffering. We overheard our Lord’s Prayer. I do not think that we really understand it except that we know that it comes out of his profound suffering in our behalf.

**You state: “*The dynamics of doubt are as complex as are the dynamics of faith, and it is important that we try to make sense out of the doubt cycle that operates in every normal human relationship in the same way that we must understand the faith cycle.*”**

**In your model you discuss going from various periods as follows: Honeymoon — settling in — discontent / disillusionment — disconnection. Then, if I understand you correctly, the relationship can move from romance to grace, from honeymoon love to fulfillment love, from youthful faith to seasoned faith. You paint a picture where doubt is useful in testing your foundation but cannot be a foundation itself. Every relationship needs to go full circle and we should not be unduly frightened by any part of the circle, as long as it stays part of the whole circle journey.**

Our journey moves toward grace if we stay in the circle.

**I am reminded of the admonition to be careful with the words one uses when in conflict or disagreement: “*A thrown stone and a spoken word can never be taken back.*”**

Yes, but even that consequence is not absolute. Grace can heal even there.

## **Different kinds of Doubting**

**You state that there are different kinds of doubts and doubters:**

- **Reflex doubting**
- **Doubting as an instrument of learning**
- **Permanent, pessimistic doubting**
- **Humorous doubting that is born of grace**

**As I understand it, your point is that doubting relates to intentions and pretensions, related to knowing myself and**

**my own need for forgiveness. Would you elaborate on these?**

I mean that doubt itself has degrees of intensity, and degrees of rightness. Some doubt is good and too much may be toxic.

## **Value of Doubt and Doubters**

**You say: “Every church, every family and every nation needs doubters who are decidedly not pessimistic nor are they foolishly optimistic. They have been mellowed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.”**

The healthy critic is really our friend – to keep us healthy and to warn us against arrogance.

**There can be no resolution for the deepest questions until we ask the deepest questions. Therefore, the courage to ask the hardest question is the first step toward the discovery of faith... What do you think are the deepest questions?**

Does God care? Do I matter? Am I needed? What moves can I now make? How can hope enter here?

**John the Baptist turned toward Jesus from his prison cell and told his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the messiah?”**

We are now standing at a crossroads in which doubt and faith unite into one catastrophic conversion point, where it is possible to say that at this precise moment John the Baptist became the man of greatest doubt and the man of greatest faith. His doubts were overwhelming, but he brought his doubts to Jesus. He turned towards Jesus for his answer. This turn towards Jesus is what faith is at its profoundest level.

**It seems to me that in life we often find ourselves standing at a crossroads. It is appropriate to pray for which direction to take.**

**Not only are there many tough choices in life but choices don't always work out for the best. There can be a great deal of loss, grief, and tears in life yet you end your book “*Trusting God*” with a quote based on “*The Silver Chair*” by C. S. Lewis:**

*“Crying is alright, in a way, as long as it lasts, but you have to stop sooner or later. Then you still have to decide what to do.”*

## **Conclusion**

**Whether you classify yourself as “atheist,” “agnostic,” “believer,” or any other label, you still have to make decisions on what to do. Christianity comes in many forms and you can choose any or none of these forms as a guide for your decisions. For me, Earl Palmer’s approach has earned my respect and trust. I pray that these dialogues have enlightened your pathway, helped you at crossroads, and opened new trails for you to explore.**

*Thank you, God, for lighting the way.*

# Trusting God

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*These questions are offered for individual meditation or small group discussion related to your concept of “Trusting God” compared to those presented in the preceding chapter, Trusting God (Christian Faith in a World of Uncertainty)*

1. What experiences brought you to trust in Jesus Christ?
2. Do you believe that faith is a choice?
3. What is your concept of the Trinity?
4. What is your belief about the language of imagery versus the literal interpretation of biblical stories such as:
  - Creation & Garden of Eden?
  - Heaven as a place?
  - Physical resurrection of the body?
  - Sitting at the right hand of God?
  - Other Images?
5. Do you believe that faith in God benefits from “vigorous examination”?
6. What do you believe about the answer, “One wonders” to complex questions?
7. How does one “trust in God” in a martial dispute when one person has faith and the other does not?
8. Do you believe that faith is not absolute and should always be testable and therefore growing?
9. Do you believe that Jesus’ words, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” express a doubt in God?
10. What have been your principal doubts about faith in Christianity?
11. Do you have any other views on trusting or doubting the Bible?

# APPENDIX

*Topic*

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# ***Encouragement Sermon***

**Earl Palmer, May 1, 2005)**

## **People Who are There for Us**

***This is a transcript from the tape of Earl Palmer's sermon on May 1, 2005 based on Proverbs 27:5,6,17-19 and Acts 11:19-30. Notice his skill as a story-teller and his inclusion of current examples related to the Biblical stories. Also, observe how he analyses the "meaning of encouragement." This transcript is unedited to preserve the dramatic nature of Earl's speaking style compared to his writing style. Copies of the audiotapes of Earl's sermons are available or purchase at UPC Tape Ministries (see list in Appendix).***

**\*\*\*\*\***

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> sermon in a series of messages that we've been preaching on the Great Cloud of Witnesses. The book of Hebrews has that wonderful line:

**"We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses... Let each of us, therefore, run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus Christ, the author and the finisher of our faith." (Heb. 12:1-2)**

We are, first of all, encouraged by the grand encourager, God Himself. And what we have been doing during this series is to try to understand the dynamics of encouragement. How does God encourage us? How do people encourage us? And how are we enabled to encourage others? We've been looking at that. And now from this point on to the end of the series, we are going to look at actual case studies of people in the New Testament who play that role – one way or another – with the people around them. That's what we will endeavor to do – to look at them and learn from their lives. Today we are going to look at Barnabas and we'll try to learn

from him ways in which we are encouraged and are able to encourage others.

***Let Us Pray:*** Lord, be our teacher. We need to be encouraged, for sure. Help us to know how to encourage others, starting with our own families and all the people around us that mean so much to us, and to the people we don't know right now. So Lord, help us to play that role too. In Christ's name. Amen

We are going to meet a wonderful man today and we first meet him early on in the Book of Acts. Here is the first encounter with this man named Barnabas:

**Acts 8:3-**: “There was a Levite (that means he was Jewish and maybe in the Levitical priestly tradition), a native of Cyprus (already the Jewish people have scattered all over the Mediterranean world.) This Jewish man is Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the Aramaic name Barnabas. ‘Bar’ in Hebrew means ‘son of.’ Remember Simon is called ‘Simon Barjonah, son of John.’ To a Scottish person McDonald says ‘son of’ Donald. The Swedes and Norwegians are famous for this: ‘Johnson, son of John’ or ‘Peterson, son of Peter.’

And in the Jewish tradition, the Barjonah would be ‘son of.’ Here it is ‘Barnabas’. So they nicknamed him “*Son of Encouragement*” and Luke, writing in Greek to his Greek audience interprets it. And he says it means, “son of encouragement,” and he uses the Greek word, ‘*paricalata*,’ son of the one who comes alongside with encouragement.

So we first meet Barnabas in Acts 8 but then we meet him again in Acts 11. Acts 11 is a wonderful text of what was happening in the early church and as you will see, Barnabas is going to play a role in this. The mob action at the stoning of Steven caused a tremendous fear to spread.

Remember the Apostle Paul who was then Saul? He was there. He voted for it. He says he, “assented to it” and it put a stain on Paul that he could never get off of his life – that he had assented to the stoning of Stephen. But he was still involved in that persecution on his road to Damascus, when Jesus Christ met him, and Saul had that incredible roadside encounter.

***“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.” (Acts 11:19)***

Antioch is a city built by the Selucid Empire, in what is today Syria. And it was quite a major city in the first century world. And they spoke the Word there to no one except Jews. But among them, were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene (that would be North Africa) who, when coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists (that would be the Greeks), also proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

When he came he saw the grace of God. He rejoiced. He exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion. And here comes Luke’s beautiful appraisal of the qualities and the character of this man Barnabas.

***“For he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great many people were brought to the Lord. And then Barnabas (now the plot thickens) went to Tarsus to look for Saul.” (Acts 11:24)***

After Saul (who later becomes Paul) had that experience on the road to Damascus and went to Damascus and there Ananias put his hands on him, and he was baptized and received his sight again. Then there is a period where we don’t really know where Paul goes. But the people, of course, are suspicious of him. They knew he was attached to the stoning of Stephen – he was attached to the persecution of the church. So he is a marauder, and they are frightened of him.

For a while we don’t know where Paul is, he ends up in his hometown of Tarsus (which is modern day northern Syria). Tarsus was a great intellectual center of the Roman Empire. That’s the city that Zeno was from, the father of Stoicism. He went back to that great University City.

***“Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was there for a whole year that they met with the church and they taught a great many people and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.”***

## APPENDIX 1 – ENCOURAGEMENT SERMON

And so Barnabas plays a great role, which we are going to be grateful for in the history of Christianity, which is that he found this man Saul, who could have maybe just languished and stayed there in Tarsus for the rest of his life. Instead it was Barnabas who found him and brought him down to Antioch and that began the ministry of the most formidable figure in the New Testament era, the Apostle Paul.

He teaches there with Barnabas at Antioch. They go to Jerusalem and take an offering to Jerusalem and then they come back to Antioch and then the Antioch Church sends these two men, and also at the beginning, John Mark. John Mark is the cousin of Barnabas. He is the one who later will write the Gospel of Mark. He will later be attached to St. Peter and be with Peter as Peter's disciple. So with Barnabas' young cousin, John Mark, they take a trip.

First they go to Cyprus, Barnabas' home, and this is the first missionary journey of St. Paul. Then they go up into Galatia. Galatia would be in the middle of what is today Turkey, so it is a long journey. They go over a mountain range. On the way there Mark decides not to go with them, so he goes back. It is just Paul and Barnabas that go up into Galatia. They go to Iconium, they come to Lystra. They have absolutely an incredible journey together, that we call the first missionary journey of St. Paul.

Then something really strange happens to them in the midst of that journey. You will find that over in Chapter 14. In Lystra, verse 8, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and never walked. He had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul (Saul is now called Paul through the rest of the New Testament) as he was speaking, and Paul looking at him intently, seeing that he had faith to be healed he said in a loud voice,

***“Stand up on your feet. The man sprang up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Laconian language, ‘The Gods have come down to us in human form.’”***

Now we are going to get a little Greek mythology from the people.

***“Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul, because he was a chief speaker, they called Hermes.” (Acts 14:8-12)***

I have to tell you a little bit about Greek mythology. Zeus is at the very apex of the pantheon of Greek gods. It gives you a little insight into Barnabas. Barnabas is probably tall and very good-looking. They don't call Paul "Zeus." They call Paul "Hermes." The Greek God Hermes is the same as the Roman god Mercury. Hermes is the god of eloquence, so they make Paul the eloquent god. By the way, that's why we talk about hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a study of what words mean and what the eloquence of a sentence is – how you interpret a sentence. The Romans borrowed all their gods from the Greeks. They didn't have many original gods; they borrow most of them. But they renamed them. They call Zeus "Jupiter" and they call Hermes "Mercury."

Barnabas they call "Zeus" and Paul they call "Hermes." This is marvelous! This will cause the church to really grow fast, won't it? If they can capture all of this Greek mythology and take control of it! Watch what they do. It's a good lesson for us: if people adore us too much, we should do what Barnabas and Paul do. It takes a little courage to do this, but watch what they do.

**"The crowd saw what Paul had done and they shouted in their language that the Gods had come down. Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priests of the Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the city gates, and he (the priest) and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and to Paul. When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard it, they tore their clothes."**

In the Jewish tradition you tear your clothes in great grief or in great despair. In despair they tore their clothes,

***"...and they rushed out into the crowd shouting, 'Friends why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you are.'"***  
***(Acts 14:11-14)***

Folks, when somebody admires you a great deal and maybe you feel like the admiration is getting a little close, too dangerous, do what they did. Rush into the crowd and say, "Hey, we're mortals – just mortals like you are." (You don't have to tear your clothes!)

And then they preached the gospel to them. They told them to leave behind idolatry and to worship the living God.

But do you know what. One paragraph later, guess what happened. This may not surprise you if you have studied crowds

## APPENDIX 1 – ENCOURAGEMENT SERMON

and crowd psychology. One paragraph later, they stoned Paul, not Barnabas – maybe Barnabas was too tall, too handsome, but they stoned Hermes. They stoned Paul almost to death. In fact it says that,

***“When they thought they had stoned him to death, they left.”  
(Acts 14:19)***

and Barnabas and the others got around Paul and nursed him back to health and brought him back. Can you believe that?

Have you ever been to a rock concert where the rock concert artist doesn't show up? Have you seen a crowd then riot? It's happened. It happened up in British Columbia. There was a rock concert and one of the musicians got sick and they said, "We have to cancel the concert tonight," and the people rioted and tore down part of the building.

Judy Garland was performing in Australia. She was singing and sang two songs in her concert and then she became ill on stage and a stage manager came out and said Miss Garland cannot continue the concert. The crowd rioted. They had to get Judy out to protect her. That's crowds. That's crowd psychology. They adore you one minute, but you disappoint them – believe me, they will hate you. That's what happened to Paul. Barnabas is there, fortunately, and probably rescued Paul's life, and for some reason Barnabas is not stoned; only Paul is stoned.

Then they get back into the city and the next day they go back to Antioch. Then they go up to Jerusalem in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas played the key role in the first great council of church and they settled the issue that Greeks do not have to become Jews to become Christians. *A Greek can become a Christian simply by believing in Jesus Christ.* And the centrality of Jesus Christ for salvation is settled at the first ecumenical council in Acts 15 and Barnabas and Paul played a key role in that.

Then they come back, Acts 15:36,

***“After these days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Come let us visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the Word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’”***

That would be back in Iconium, Lystra, Galatia.

***“And Barnabas wanted to take with them John, called Mark (this is John Mark, his young cousin) but Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia.”***

Pamphylia is the coast, before they went over the mountains to go up to Galatia. For some reason or other, John Mark, decided he didn't want to go over that 9,000-foot mountain, but wanted to go home. And Paul didn't forgive him for that.

This is the harder period in Paul's life, and later Paul was totally mellow. In fact, when we get to the last letters of Paul, he honors Mark and he honors Barnabas, but right now Paul takes a hard line. When Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, Paul said no, because, "He deserted us."

Notice how realistic Luke is, the beloved Luke who is Paul's great friend, who writes this.

*"The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company and Barnabas took Mark with him and went to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and set out, and the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches." (Acts 15:39)*

The rest of the Book of Acts will be primarily devoted to St. Paul. The great missionary journeys are numbers two and three. And Paul is going to travel with other friends, two Greeks, Timothy and a doctor named Luke and a Jewish friend Silvanus.

There you have the relationship between St. Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas is the one who is called, "the son of encouragement." Barnabas is an encourager of St. Paul and I think that Paul plays a role of encouragement toward Barnabas as well. I want us to reflect on that right now.

I want to make three reflections on how Barnabas played his role in Paul's life.

First, Barnabas found Paul at Tarsus and he brought him into the family of believers. We owe a debt to Barnabas. If it had not been for him, maybe Paul would never have left Tarsus. And yet, Barnabas went up to look for Saul and he brought him down to Antioch, and the rest is history.

Has anyone played that part in your life? Somebody who finds you, and because of their clout -. You see, it is well established that Barnabas had tremendous clout with the early church. They named him "Son of encouragement." He is the one they sent from Jerusalem down to Antioch to check on the church. He is the leader and an impressive man in every way. By the way, in the Corinthian letter, they say of Paul,

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***“He writes weighty letters but when you see him you will not be impressed.”***

Paul was evidently not an impressive appearing man, but Barnabas evidently was. So here is Barnabas with all this personal clout and stature and he plays this role.

He finds Paul and he brings him to Antioch. Paul is this man that everybody is suspicious of and everybody is even a little bit frightened of, and Barnabas clears the way for Paul to come into the fellowship. Have you ever been with somebody who brings you along to a privileged place and the people kind of look at you to imply the question, “What are you doing here?” and your friend says, “It’s okay, he’s with me.” Has anybody ever played that role with you? It’s okay, he’s with me. To be with someone who has so much stature that they can plow the way for you.

They say that most boys get their first job by some contact that their father has, or some caring adult, plays a role to help them find their first job. Have you had somebody who plowed the way a little bit for you – use a little bit of their prestige and put a little bit on the line for you? Like a little kid, maybe at school at lunch. Lunch is one of the most terrifying hours of the day for an American high schooler. And a kid, who maybe is an outsider, maybe just moved into town and doesn’t know anybody, maybe goes to church that Sunday and it so happens that the quarterback of the football team is there at church and sees him. At any American high school, the quarterback is at the apex of prestige. He is the Zeus in any high school. And that boy sees this little kid at lunch hour and the little kid doesn’t have any place to eat, and that’s the most terrifying time. It it’s a closed school and you can’t go off campus, you are stuck. Where are you going to eat – with the nerds in the cafeteria or with the popular kids? You can’t go there, you can’t crash that tight circle. But here is a quarterback that comes up to you and says, *“Your name is Chip, did I see you at church Sunday?”*

*“Yeh,” “Where are you eating lunch?”.... “Oh, I don’t know.”*

*“Hey, come with me.”*

And he takes you into the circle. Have you ever had anybody do that for you? Have you ever done that for anybody? – Using your prestige to make a way for someone to come on in? That’s encouragement. That’s Barnabas and he does it for St. Paul. Aren’t we grateful that happened at a key moment in human history?

Then secondly, he journeys with Paul. That's another profoundly encouraging thing that he does. He risks the first missionary journey with Paul. Maybe he saves his life after the stoning that Paul experienced. They compliment each other. He is impressive, maybe Paul is not. Paul is brilliant and Paul is a tremendous speaker, so Barnabas backs him up throughout that incredible journey with Paul.

They go together and they go up to Jerusalem and win the case for the Greek Christians in Jerusalem. Paul probably could have done that alone. Barnabas' clout helps there too. He is journeying with Paul.

It is such a beautiful thing to see people in this church – here is a young person that goes out to the mission field, like Marty Bennett, who goes over to Africa. It's so heartwarming to discover a lot of her friends that were friend in high school and in college with her. They are in her prayer group, and keep supporting her. If they can, they try to make a trip to Kenya to visit her. If they can't, they travel with her with their prayers and with their financial support. They are holding onto Marty Bennett and letting her know they are with her in that mission.

Are you doing that with anybody? Is anybody doing it with you, so that when you do go somewhere, you have somebody who is watching your back – somebody who is actually there with you in it. That's another role that Barnabas plays. Paul, too – Paul is with Barnabas, Barnabas is with Paul.

That's encouraging. But then he disagrees with Paul about his young cousin Mark. As a matter of fact, they have a sharp disagreement and they separate ways and break off from each other. Have you ever had that happen to you?

Now we give a cheer for the first two kinds of encouragement – the one who makes a way for you in, and the one who comes along side of you and stays with you in the journey, but be honest with me. Do you want to cheer for the third kind of encouragement when someone dares to challenge *you* and maybe break away from you? How can it be encouraging? How can this sharp disagreement between Barnabas and Paul be encouraging?

First it is honest, and we need clear-headed encounters in order to keep us on track. I feel sorry for leaders who are never challenged. I feel sorry for a president who doesn't surround

## APPENDIX 1 – ENCOURAGEMENT SERMON

himself with people that can say “no” to him as well as to say, “yes” to him. ***One of the greatest dangers of power is that when you have power very few people dare to say “no” to you. You are lucky if you have some who do.***

Have you ever had anybody break away from you? I feel sorry for a leader who hasn't had somebody who is outstanding break away from him and say, “I'm not going with you any more.” That's encouraging in a way, because it can create within you a shock of recognition. It can be a clearing of the air. And Barnabas does this. He is called the encourager in this but also Barnabas has a perspective larger than what Paul could see at this point in his life. Later on Paul will mellow, but Paul is not mellow right now, and he doesn't have the large perspective that Barnabas does. Barnabas knows that not only is he Paul's encourager, he is his young cousin's encourager too. What would have happened to Mark if Barnabas had agreed with Paul and gone off on the missionary journey and left Mark behind?

This Mark is the man who will later write the Gospel of Mark! I wonder if he would have written it if he had been left behind. He is the one, who joins up with St. Peter, and Peter pays a great tribute to Mark, and Paul does too, later. But if it wasn't for Barnabas who has a larger perspective than Paul does, who realizes that he has to encourage this guy too, as well as Paul – they have this sharp disagreement. And they broke apart.

So aren't we grateful? This third kind of encouragement is the salty kind of encouragement that is honorable, but it's conflict – a disagreement, but it can be honorable.

One of my heroes in theology is Karl Barth. He makes an interesting comment about church splits. He says, “You know I'm not alarmed about church splits because they are part of the visibility of the church.”

I'll tell you a true story. I was on a plane once and there was a Southern Baptist gentleman sitting next to me. By the way I shared this with Southern Baptists at a convention. I said to this young man, “You know I am so impressed with the Southern Baptist Church. You grow so fast. You are the fastest growing church in America. How do you do it?” (We Presbyterians have not done that so well.) “What's your strategy?” He said, “I don't really know. I think it's this way. We get a church started and then there's a big

fight in the church and a group breaks away and they go about a mile away and start another church. I think that's how most of our churches grow." And then later we all end up great friends. Not so bad, huh?

Do you know what's happening with our Roman Catholic parents and our Greek Orthodox uncles and aunts? As the reformed Christians, we are the rebellious teenagers. We are gradually learning to listen to our parents and listen to our uncles and aunts – Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox. We are beginning to learn from each other, and yet we had very hostile splits in church history. It was a long time ago! It's true. Both Popes excommunicated each other. The pope from Constantinople and the pope from Rome excommunicated each other and each thought that they sent the other to hell ... and it didn't work.

No I'm not so upset when there is disagreement in the body of Christ if it is honorable. There can be honorable disagreement and that's what happened between Paul and Barnabas. And I call that encouragement. And it turned out to be encouragement for Mark and for Paul. In the book of Colossians, as Paul writes in prison, he honors Mark and Barnabas.

Have you experienced these three kinds of encouragement? Someone who helps you with their stature to encourage you in and to help you make friends, help you find a job? Someone who has journeyed with you and then someone who has dared to say no to you?

***“Heavenly father, help us to be encouragers and help us to encourage one another and not run away from encouragement but to welcome it in our own lives, so that we can grow in grace as we grow in age. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.”***

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## Appendix 2

# *University Presbyterian Church (UPC)*

*Just as it's hard to talk about artists without showing their work, it's equally hard to talk about pastors without discussing the churches they lead. Therefore, I will give a brief description of UPC where Earl Palmer is the Senior Pastor.*

### History of Leadership

The UPC is located on the northwest corner of the University of Washington campus where it has been since 1908, with the first building completed in 1920. The history of the church is well told in the UPC website, [www.upc.org](http://www.upc.org) which documents the early leadership, and continued growth of UPC. The breadth of UPC expanded under the leadership of Dr. Robert Munger from 1962-1969 followed by Richard Langford from 1970-1977. Bruce Larson provided dynamic leadership from 1978-1990, during which time there was a major growth in programs and building projects. In 1991 he accepted the calling to be a co-pastor of the Crystal Cathedral with the Reverend Robert Schuller. Bruce has retired but is back in this area and attends worship services at UPC.

Earl Palmer has been Senior Pastor of UPC since 1991, where he had previously served as a Youth Minister from 1956 to 1964. Under Earl's leadership the membership has grown to over 4,500, almost 4,000 worshippers each Sunday, and with more than 700 children in Sunday School. There are five services each Sunday at 8:30, 10:00, 11:30, 5:00 and 7:00. The motto of UPC is, "*Every member a minister.*"

## Small Choices in a Big Church

The church supports a number of small classes in Bible Study and fellowship. One of the evening programs is entitled, "Life Together: Preparing for Marriage". In addition to foreign missionaries, relief workers from the membership paid their own way to provide assistance for the victims of the New Orleans and Katrina devastating hurricanes of 2015.

Beyond mere introduction to other people attending, there are light meals before and after each Sunday service, providing opportunity for friends and fellowship.

The pastoral staff and member volunteers are available for individual prayers after each Sunday service and by appointment at other times.

## Library

The church has an excellent library that contains not only books for all ages and spiritual interests, but also has tapes of weekly sermons going back for a number of years. These tapes are for sale as well as for loan. Many of the CDs are regularly mailed to various individuals in other countries around the world.

The library is named in memory of Jean Elliott Roberts. Mrs. Roberts died in an automobile accident. A plaque in the library also honors Laura Crowe, Professor of Speech at the University of Washington.

Each Sunday the 10:00 a.m. service is carried on local Seattle area AM radio station 630- KCIS. The UPC hour has the highest listener rating of KCIS programming. There are an estimated 7,000 listeners each Sunday. You can also listen to the latest or a prior sermon on the UPC web site: [www.upc.org](http://www.upc.org)

## Don't Bore Kids

Denny Rydberg, one of UPC's previous Directors of University Ministries, has been President of Young Life International since 1993. Young Life is one of the world's largest Christian youth organizations, reaching nearly 700,000 teen-agers each year through weekly meetings, summer camps and one-on-one relationships with adult leaders. It is a non-denominational organization active in over 500 communities in the U.S. as well as in Canada and 36 other countries. Rydberg quotes Young Life Founder Jim Rayburn, who said, "It's a sin to bore a kid with the gospel. Win the right to be heard. And go where the kids are."

## New Church on Lake Union

UPC is presently aiding in the development of a Presbyterian congregation on Lake Union in downtown Seattle. This site has been chosen to fill the needs of downtown residents including many condominium and apartment dwellers.

Pastor James B. Notkin, formerly on the pastoral staff at UPC, has been chosen to lead this development. When it is chartered by the Presbytery it will be on it's own. It takes about 200 people to make a church viable and to petition the Presbytery to become a chartered Presbyterian Church. Until then, they will have a steering committee. It's ironic that the thing that may limit this new Lake Union Church may be parking.

## Appendix 3

### *Books by Earl Palmer*

This appendix includes a list of Earl Palmer's books from 1977 to the present. One of the good things about Palmer's writing is that it is, "Timeless," and his early books are as relevant to modern questions as his later books. Earl shows remarkable consistency in his literary style and conclusions. Each book is a rewarding experience.

The books listed below are perfect adjuncts to discussion groups for persons of any religious persuasion.

*Love Has Its Reasons: An Inquiry Into New Testament Love,*  
**Word Books, 1977**

*Salvation by Surprise: Commentary on the Book of Romans,* **Word Books, 1975; Republished by Regent College Publishing in 1999**

*The Intimate Gospel: Studies in John,* **Word Publishing, 1978,**  
**Republished as *The Book that John Wrote,* Regent College, 2000**

*The Preacher's Commentary: I, II, III John & Revelation,*  
**General Editor, Lloyd Oligvie, Thomas Nelson Publishers 1982**

*I & II Thessalonians: A Good News Commentary,* **Word Books, 1983**

*Old Law-New Life: The Ten Commandments and New Testament Faith,* **Abingdon Press, 1984**

*A Faith That Works: Weathering the Storms of Doubt,* **Regal Books, 1985**

APPENDIX 3 – BOOKS BY EARL PALMER

*The Enormous Exception: Meeting Christ in the Sermon on the Mount*, **Word Books, 1986**

*Laughter in Heaven: and other Surprising Truths in the Parables of Jesus*, **Word Books, 1997; Republished by Regent College Publishing, 2004**

*The 24-Hour Christian: Sheer Encouragement For the Christian in the World*, **InterVarsity Press 1987; Republished by Regent College Publishing, 2001**

*Signposts: Living With Christian Values in an Age of Uncertainty*, **W. Pub Group, 1990**

*Prayer Between Friends: Cultivating our Friendship with God*, **Fleming H. Revell Company, 1991; Republished by Regent College Publishing 2001**

*Integrity: A Commentary on the Book of Philippians*, **Regent College Publishing, 1992;**

*The Book that James Wrote*, **William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997**

*The Humor of Jesus: Sources of Laughter in the Bible*, **Regent College Publishing, 2001**

*Trusting God: Christian Faith in a World of Uncertainty*, **Regent College Publishing, 2006**

*Dialogues with Earl Palmer*, (A Biographical sketch of Earl Palmer and a dialogue between Palmer and Yarnall) **Snohomish Publishing Company, 2008 (Primary Author, Stephen Yarnall, MD)**

## *Appendix 4*

### *Earl's Favorite Books Beyond the Bible*

Earl, as a mentor, is so wide-read in faith, fact, fiction and fantasy that any reference to “favorite” must depend on timing and context. I suggest the universal answer, “It Depends!” If one were to count the times an author was mentioned in his sermons I suspect C.S. Lewis would lead the list! G.K. Chesterton is often quoted and I encourage the reader to become a listener to Palmer’s sermon of September 16, 2007. You may order an audiotape (see Appendix) or listen on [www.upc.org](http://www.upc.org). Palmer, like Chesterton, is a preacher of joy. The Bible more than any other source is Earl’s primary reference. His story-telling style gives new life to passages placed in historical settings. His book reading habit provides the basis of his own broad perspective on and communicating about the Bible and Christianity.

#### *Earl, what would be included in your list of favorite books?*

If I were to choose the most influential books in my intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage, after the Bible, my list would look like this:

- **G.K. Chesterton:** *“The Everlasting Man & Orthodoxy”*  
I love his humor and ability to stir up my imagination.
- **Helmut Thielicke:** *“How the World Began”*  
I learned about preaching from Thielicke.
- **J.R.R. Tolkien:** *“The Lord of the Rings”*  
How can anyone miss out on the adventures of Frodo and Sam Gamgee?
- **Karl Barth:** *“Dogmatics in Outline”*  
I deeply appreciate his boldness and serious intention to hear and obey the biblical text. He is the theologian’s theologian.

## APPENDIX 4 – EARL’S FAVORITE BOOKS

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** *“Cost of Discipleship”* & *“Letters & Papers from Prison”*  
He called out to me to decided once and for all about what matters most in my life.
- **John Calvin:** *“Institutes”*  
His impressive grasp of the large outline of the gospel’s meaning makes Calvin exciting.
- **Blaise Pascal:** *“Pensees”*  
Here is the sheer thrill of a mind alive to the relevance of Jesus Christ.
- **Martin Luther:** *“Lectures on Romans”*  
As fresh and electric today, as in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- **C. S. Lewis:** *“The Chronicles of Narnia”* & *“Screwtape Letters”*  
I owe so much to C.S. Lewis, especially the wonderful mixture of the surprise and goodness of God.
- **Paul Tournier:** *“Secrets”*  
Psychological wisdom and evenhandedness.
- **Dostoyevsky:** *“Crime and Punishment”* & *“The Brothers Karamazov”*  
The greatest novels I ever read.
- **Mark Twain & Robert Benchley**  
For their rich humor and insight into personality.
- **T. S. Eliot, W.H. Auden & Robert Frost**  
These poets have given me a deep respect for words.
- **Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyesky, Boris Pasternak & Alexander Solzhenitsyn**  
These Russian writers have stirred me emotionally and spiritually more than all other novelists.
- **Herman Wouk:** *“Winds of War”* & *“War and Rememberance”*  
Most impressive recent novels.
- **Victor Hugo:** *“Les Miserables”*
- **Karl Barth, by Eberhard Busch and William Borden, by Mrs. Howard Taylor**  
Most impressive biographies I have read.

# Appendix 4

## Humor

**“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine...”  
(Proverbs 17:22)**

*Earl Palmer is certainly a man with a “sense of humor.” He brings laughter into all of his sermons and a light touch into all of his writing. Laughter helps free us from stress and experience shows that “Humor heals.” Here’s a list of Earl’s favorite funny writers.*

- 1. Mark Twain**  
The greatest American Comic Philosopher, both funny and wise.
- 2. C.S. Lewis**  
Brilliant at satire, analogy and the best letter writer I have read.
- 3. John Bunyan**  
A wit that is rich in understanding of the human personality and the wonder of God’s grace.
- 4. G.K. Chesterton**  
No one uses language better than G.K. Chesterton.
- 5. Dorothy Sayers**  
She has a bold edge to her descriptions, both funny and insightful.
- 6. Robert Benchley**  
The master of the humor of misunderstandings.
- 7. Patrick McManus**  
Totally off the wall and down to earth at the same time.
- 8. Garrison Keillor**  
A modern story-teller to match Mark Twain.
- 9. Dr. Seuss**  
Clever and funny and warm-hearted.
- 10. A. A. Milne**  
He knows how to create characters in which we see ourselves and then laugh.

**11. William Shakespeare**

He understands how to mix humor and pathos.

**12. Maurice Sendak**

Is there any poem with as much fun and moral truth as “Pierre”?

## **A Few Additional Humor References**

*The best single reference I can give for humor books is the catalog from:*

*The HUMOR Project, Inc.*

*480 Broadway, Suite 210,*

*Saratoga Springs, NY 12866*

*Visit their website: [www.HumorProject.com](http://www.HumorProject.com)*

*I have too many books on my bookshelves to list them all, but here are a few samples from a “humor addicted physician.”*

**1. Braude’s**

**Treasury of Wit and Humor** - is one of several joke books, which are useful.

**2. Dr. Laurance J. Peter and Bill Dana**

**The Laughter Prescription** - gives an approach on how to achieve health, happiness, and peace of mind through humor.

**3. John Durant and Jonathan Miller**

**Laughing Matters** - a serious look at humor, is what it says it is.

**4. Dan Greenburg**

**How to make Yourself Miserable** - helps us laugh at our problems.

**5. Dave Barry**

**Stay fit and Healthy Until You’re Dead** - cartoons and humorous advice from one America’s premier humorists.

6. ***Erma Bombeck***  
**The Family Ties that Bind..... and Gag!** - is one of a number of books by Erma who was a regular on ABC's "Good Morning America" for many years.
7. ***Rich Hall and Friends***  
**More Sniglets (Words that don't appear in the dictionary but should)** ... such as "Lorp," the part of the shoe that collapses when you try to pull it on without a shoehorn ... or "Loomies," jockey shorts that have lost their elasticity. Creating sniglets is a good group game!
8. ***Bruce Feirstein***  
**Real Men Don't Eat Quiche** - Humorously sarcastic portrayal of masculinity. "In the past it was easy to be a Real Man." All you had to do was abuse women, steal land from the Indians and find a place to dump toxic waste.
9. ***Ester Blumenfeld and Lynne Alpern***  
**The Smile Connection - How to Use Humor in Dealing With People**, a 1986 book, which is still pertinent today.
10. ***Antoine de Saint-Exupery***  
**The Little Prince** - Is a classic for all ages. This is one of the most treasured books in my library and it contains numerous messages such as, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

**My intent of listing these books is not to recommend that you read every one of them, with the exception of the The Little Prince, which is a "must read." My advice is that you form your own library of humor books, which may contain titles and topics similar to those I randomly pulled off of my bookshelves. So save your time, read The Little Prince and use reading as one of the methods of bringing more humor into your life.**

**Earl Palmer certainly combines wit and wisdom in his speaking and writing, as did the Reverend Dale Turner, Seattle Times Religion columnist for over 20 years. In his column of Saturday, March 21, 1992, he quipped, "Make no funny bones about it, a good guffaw is good for the soul." Turner stated, "The time has come to take humor seriously; the Creator gave us a backbone**

to meet life's ills but he gave us a funny bone to help us over the rough places." Among items, which he called "Funny business," he noted,

"Those proud of keeping an orderly desk never know the thrill of finding something they thought was irretrievably lost!"

When it comes to what's funny or who is funny, "There are different strokes for different folks." Here's a list of Earl's favorites with his comments:

1. ***Jonathan Winters***  
No one takes you on and surprises you like Winters.
2. ***Bob Hope***  
The master of stand-up comedy.
3. ***W.C. Fields***  
The bumbling put-down artist.
4. ***Lucille Ball***  
America's funniest woman.
5. ***Dick Van Dyke***  
He mixes a human touch with impishness.
6. ***Ray Goulding & Bob Elliott***  
These two always take you in and you know it's happening.
7. ***Red Skelton***  
America's clown with a warm and totally child-like heart.
8. ***Jack Benny***  
No one had timing down like Benny.
9. ***Mary Tyler Moore***  
You love her and want to laugh with her.
10. ***Bill Cosby***  
You feel he knows all about you.
11. ***Johnny Carson***  
The perfect interview master, especially with ordinary people.
12. ***John Cleese***  
The Master of Misunderstanding.

**Here is a list of additional funny folks, who are my favorite's.**

- 1. *George Burns***  
With his cigar and dry-wit.
- 2. *Woody Allen***  
With his outrageous plots.
- 3. *Gracie Allen***  
George's straight side-kick.
- 4. *Steve Martin***  
The original Jerk.
- 5. *Victor Borge***  
A brilliant pianist, whose fall off the piano bench is one of his many funny "bits".
- 6. *Robin Williams***  
"Good Morning Vietnam" etc.
- 7. *Rodney Dangerfeld***  
... "Take my wife please!"
- 8. *Smothers Brothers***  
Think the most of a "smart guy – dumb guy".
- 9. *Carol Channing***  
"The first 80 years are the hardest." Carol placed third in a Carol Channing Look-Alike-Contest.
- 10. *Red Skelton & Patch Adams***  
"Send in the Clowns"
- 11. *Eddie Murray***  
Makes you laugh 'til you cry!
- 12. *Others - You fill in the list...***

**You, and each reader, will have your own favorite books and comedians and may discover as did G.K. Chesterton, that "The Gigantic Secret of God is mirth." To this I might add that it is no secret that part of the appeal of Earl Palmer is his mirth. Earl's use of humor is completely natural and adds to his messages of Christianity.**

## Appendix 6

# *UPC Audio Ministry*

## UPC Audio Ministries

4540 – 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
Seattle, WA 98105

You can buy single tapes or a series of sermons or classes on audiocassettes or CDs. Request your catalog with listings of over 100 available tapes and CDs by calling 206-524-7301, ext. 117 or writing to the above address.

Current single tapes are available in the UPC Library. Sermons can be listened to on the website [www.upc.org](http://www.upc.org) or live at 10:00 a.m. on 630 AM KCIS Radio in Seattle.

### Six ways Earl's tapes may be used:

1. Experience and re-experience EARL'S SPOKEN MESSAGES!
2. Make use of traffic delays – listen in your car!
3. Capture quotes for talks, papers or “down times”!
4. Use for study or discussion groups.
5. Give as gifts to distant family, friends or business contacts.
6. Answer a calling—

...and – if you're in a missionary mood – consider giving a selected set of tapes or CD's to a church, mission, prison, library, auction, school, hospital, nursing home, or home-bound person where the words of Earl Palmer would make a difference.

Reach out to someone in difficult times where even one tape might matter – and say you care.

Be an encourager – of yourself and others!

*“Everyone is a minister”*

# **FEEDBACK**

The author would appreciate comments, compliments, criticism, corrections and candid suggestions about these DIALOGUES.

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Or email to: [yarnsy@comcast.net](mailto:yarnsy@comcast.net)

Orders of 10 or more copies should be sent to the author.

Messages to Earl Palmer will be forwarded, with thanks but without promise of reply.