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#### PathPointe Magazine

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# The Merchant and The Pearl

*Dr. T. D. Worthington*

*“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”*

**Matthew 13:44-46**

You might see a person with a successful career, houses, cars, and wealth. You might even see him helping the poor and being a friend to the hurting. He is known for supporting outcasts, standing up for his friends, and generously rewarding his loyal employees. You could label him as successful. Or, you could call him by his name. His name is Al...*Al Capone*.

He was successful, but we cannot call his “*success*” good because God was definitely displeased with how he achieved it. How do

you define success? While many different answers exist, we all too often define it as the world does. However, as believers, we must always return to God’s Word and seek the biblical definition of success.

Some people believe that success means achieving financial freedom. For others, it signifies having more time or greater fulfillment. Success for us may also include being recognized by others as successful. As Christians, we need to return to the biblical foundations of defining success. We should focus on God’s definition of the kind of success that benefits His Kingdom.

Worldly standards do not define biblical success. Jesus, in many regards, looked like a failure to the world. *True success should always reflect God’s purpose for our lives, the use of our spiritual gifts, and the opportunities God provides us to serve Him better.* It is never simply about doing a good job or achieving something. Results do not measure success; it is measured by obedience.

May I confess something to you? According to the world’s standards, I have never been as successful in the ministry as I was in the secular world. I have never received the money, recognition, rewards, or approval in the ministry that I earned in the world. I received numerous promotions, awards, and bonuses. I continued in my secular job for about four years after I became a Christian, and during that time, I used my position to witness for Christ, leading several coworkers to our Lord. I used my income to support God’s work and help those in need. I was successful, but I wasn’t where God wanted me to be. Please let me make this clear, it was not where God wanted *me* to be. Such a place might be exactly where He wants you, but it was not where He wanted me.

I kept climbing higher and higher up the ladder of success until one day I realized my ladder was leaning against the wrong tree. The tree was not a bad tree; it was just the wrong tree. My true ministry, the one God called me to pursue, could

be best fulfilled *within a ministry*, a place dedicated to serving Christ. The company I worked for, the one that had been so good to me, the one that had given me the opportunity to succeed, was not in business to minister but to make a profit.

Now, as a capitalist, I don't oppose any honest business making a profit. However, as a Christian businessman, my primary job, in which I worked about 60 hours a week, was not to serve Christ but to generate profits for my employer. Furthermore, if the business ever ceased to make a profit, it would close. Again, some very dedicated Christians could do that and be totally within the will of God, but like so many other things, there has been a long list of things that God would not allow me to do. To accomplish my ministry, I had to work within the framework of a ministry, *not a business*. The question was not, with my spiritual gifts, where can I glorify God, because I could do that anywhere. Instead, the question became, where could I glorify God the most?

The path God gave me is most likely not the one you're on; I understand that. However, God *has* laid out a path for you. You don't need to keep throwing stuff against the wall to see what sticks. God has already prepared the way. The biblical definition of success is trusting God's plan and the beautiful life God has already created for you.

In **Matthew 13**, we have a great collection of parables; mustard seed, leaven, buried treasure, pearls, dragnets, and more, all neatly packed into one place. We

know they are about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, but otherwise, their exact meanings are a bit uncertain. It is helpful to remember that the parables aren't meant to have precise meanings anyway. Instead, they are designed to puzzle, to disturb, and to challenge our usual ways of thinking. They are encouraging us to keep returning again and again, exploring a wide range of interpretations. They provoke us to think more profound thoughts. They invite us to expand our imaginations and better understand the nature of man and of the God we serve.

Regarding parables and referring to **Isaiah 6**, the Lord instructs us in **Mark 4:11-12** that the purpose of parables is to reveal the truth to humble hearts and conceal the truth from hard hearts.

As we look again at **Matthew 13:45**, it seems easy enough to understand. The merchant must be a disciple, and the pearl is Jesus. Or, perhaps Jesus is the merchant and the Kingdom is the pearl. Then again, could it be that the pearl is the church and Jesus is the merchant? Could it be any of those possibilities? Could there be even more? Maybe the parable is about our need to sacrifice what we have to follow Jesus, what we might call the "*cost of discipleship*." If so, remember that the merchant isn't just throwing everything away; he's trading it in to buy something he wants more. He had a loss, but also a gain.

The Scripture also does not tell us what he does with this pearl. Perhaps he hides it away in a closet. Maybe he is not even sure why he

wants this pearl so badly. Are you confused yet? We might see nuggets of truth in all the possibilities, but we know we need to do some digging. The truth is in there somewhere. Or, perhaps there is more than one truth hidden there; some Scriptures are designed that way.

One interesting facet about this story is that at the end, the merchant essentially withdraws from his business. Did you notice that? He appears to be giving up his livelihood. How is he going to make a living? By this decision, he is no longer a merchant. All he has is one pearl, which he does not intend to let go of. He has redefined himself by making one decision.

Now, we see what is happening. He has become a new man. He is not the same old merchant he used to be. He's now the guy who knows he possesses something of great value, and he is not about to give it up! What's more, he knows that if this "*pearl*" is something beyond all the other fine pearls, it can only increase in value. He will literally be able to live off the interest. This can change the way we look





at all the other things he has been chasing! All the other stuff, whether they be diamonds or money, the right schools, the right job, the right neighborhood, the perfect family, all of those things he's been trading for, fine as they may be, still left him with an unshakable feeling that he was missing something. This man has finally concluded that he must divest himself of all the things he has been chasing to make room for something of even more profound and lasting value. Is this story about you? I know it is about me! I found the great pearl and ceased to be a merchant. That's simple enough.

That is what God wanted for me. I was to let go of every ounce of my self-righteous certainty and divest myself from all those fine pearls of what I thought defined me as successful, and have the courage to grab onto a deeper identity. I was to lay claim to something greater, even before I was sure what it was. My carefully contrived self-image had to be relinquished. If I were no longer restrained by being a merchant, what else could I be? What else could you be? That

doesn't mean you can't continue serving God right where you are. I could not do that, but I clearly understand that many can. If it is God's will for your life, I applaud it and respect it. But perhaps even within the confines of where you are right now, God still wants you to place a higher priority on representing Christ. After all, He is a treasure of priceless value.

However, although I have purposely presented our Lord in this light to help you understand the multiple layers of the parables, I need to tell you that in this parable, Jesus is not the pearl of great price; you are. Now, let's get back to our Scripture.

***“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”***

I said earlier that the parables aren't meant to have a clear meaning. Instead, they are designed to puzzle, to disturb, and to challenge our ways of thinking, encouraging us to keep returning again and again, exploring a wide range of interpretations. Parables reveal truth, sometimes in many layers, to those who seek it, while concealing truth from those who don't really want it.

**Verse 44** obviously refers to Israel, hidden, found, and hidden again until God comes to redeem the field.

However, in **Verses 45-46**, the pearl of great price is the church. It is you and I, whom the very lifeblood of Christ has purchased. Have you noticed how often God instructs us to do as He does? He tells us to love as He loves, to work as He works, and to forgive as He forgives. Here we have the same principle. Here, He asks you to value Him as He values you. Serve Him and cherish Him, as He serves and cherishes you. In these verses, you and I are the pearl, and Jesus gives His very life to redeem us for Himself. But now, here is where it turns around; now you and I should be willing to do the same for Him.

So, here is the message: if you are where God wants you to be. If you are where your ministry can best shine, where you can serve Him fully and wholeheartedly, then you must shine right where you are. We need believers out there shining in the world. However, for others, you might shine better, or have more opportunities to shine, or better utilize your Spiritual gifts somewhere else. Perhaps like me, your ministry might need to be linked to another ministry to flourish. If so, that is where you need to be. After all, you belong to Christ, and you have been bought with a great price. You are His pearl, and He should be yours.



*Dr. Worthington has been in the ministry nearly fifty years and serves as President of Pathway Ministries and Christian Bible College.*



# Radio**bits**

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## Reflections of Summer

In speaking with several of our local pastors, I have taken note that this past summer has been notoriously tough on many church ministries. Like most Christian organizations, at **GoMix**, we always plan for a drop in giving over the summer months, but this year, even some of our most loyal contributors have been unable to give.

This is easy to understand. Things can get a bit tight on all of us. Sometimes people are unaware of a need they could help with. Other times, folks are so busy finding childcare for their kids, working full-time, and arranging to get away for a few days of vacation, Christian giving just slips off the radar.



This summer has also strained our budget more than usual due to the extensive damage we sustained during the seasonal thunderstorms. Power surges and lightning hits have been unusually challenging for us this year. Even with protection in place, the damaging spikes managed to find a pathway to our equipment.

This summer, we have been excited about placing several new stations on the air. However, as those new station expenses start immediately, it takes a while to build up a supporting audience in those new areas.

As you know, we try not to mention financial needs much during the year, but as **Share-A-Thon** time rolls around, we like to ask all our loyal listeners if they might prayerfully consider continuing their support of Christian radio.

As our **BIG HARVEST** fund drive starts on **October 6th**, please

consider a special gift of support. If you have received a **Pre-Share-A-Thon Contribution Card** in the mail, please consider returning it with your tax-deductible gift.

As believers, the growth and influence of Christian Radio in Eastern Carolina will be one of the most fascinating chapters in our recent history. God's providential hand has been miraculous. Thank you for uniting with us on this exciting journey of faith.

For Additional Information:

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# Wastin' Time

There was a popular song that hit number 1 on the *Billboard* charts in March of 1968. Otis Redding recorded “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay” the previous year in hopes of having a chart topper, but unfortunately didn’t live to see the success his song would become just a few months later. He was tragically killed in a plane crash in December of 1967, just three days after the recording.

Many of us can easily sing along with the lyrics we still remember some fifty plus years after his death. The singer sits on the dock of the San Francisco Bay

day and night, watching ships move in and out, wasting his time away... Wasting his life away. If Otis had only known of his short-lived future, he probably wouldn’t have been so keen on wasting that precious time.

Time is a gift. Life is a precious gift. Let’s learn all we can from the mistakes of others so that we don’t repeat those same mistakes. Let’s do all we can to live for the Lord today and tell others of the hope we have in Christ. Tomorrow will be tomorrow. Today we have today. Let’s not waste it!



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# Obedience Can Hurt!

Dr. Sherry Worthington

*“What am I going to do? Why did the Lord tell me? Maybe Eli won’t ask me. Maybe I shouldn’t tell him all that God said.”* Can you imagine being Samuel and the Lord telling you the future of someone you loved very much, and it was awful? **I Samuel 3:15** states, *“And Samuel lay until the morning and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.”*

The story of Samuel has always amazed me. His mother willingly gave him to God without promise of another child. God blessed her with more children, but not before she left Samuel in the temple with Eli. Scripture indicates that she only saw him once a year from the time he was 3 or 4 years old. I can only imagine how hard that was. She must have been familiar with the temple's environment at that time. Hannah trusted God and left him with Eli. When chapter 2 of

Samuel begins, Hannah is praising the Lord. Why? It does not show her crying as she leaves. It shows her rejoicing over her salvation.

Hannah was obedient to God, even when it hurt. I am sure it hurt her to leave her son with Eli, especially knowing that Eli's sons were evil. It was well known in Israel. However, she honored God above herself, and she left him there. In *I Samuel 2:29b*, Eli is warned by a man of God of the consequences of honoring his sons above God.

As Samuel grew up in the temple, he served Eli faithfully. When the Lord called to him in the night, it was Samuel's first encounter with the Lord (**I Samuel 3:7**). I cannot imagine being in his shoes. It is hard enough for me to tell someone something I know they don't want to hear, and much less that their children were going to die and it was their fault.

I have read these verses over and over again, looking to see where God commanded Samuel to tell Eli the words of the Lord. God tells him that He is going to judge Eli's family because Eli doesn't restrain his children. Samuel has to tell Eli that he is a bad father, and it is too late now. I imagine Samuel contemplated what to do as he lay in the bed that night. When Eli called to him the next morning, he asked him what the Lord said and not to hide anything. He instructs Samuel to tell him the truth. Samuel had a choice. Oswald Chambers points out that God did not tell Samuel to tell Eli the vision. He left it up to him. Samuel had to choose to be obedient. He could not lie to Eli in order to spare his feelings.

Isn't it tempting to try to shield others from hurt and suffering? Sometimes it is ourselves we are trying to protect. We really don't want to talk to someone about their

sin and how it is affecting others. We don't want to tell a friend that the person she trusted has betrayed her. There are numerous instances where we make soft decisions or soft pedal the truth to justify our actions.

Samuel made the right choice. He told Eli that God said, *"...For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not..."*

### **I Samuel 3:13**

The following chapters and verses explain the fate of Eli, and Samuel becomes the leader of Israel. It is a sad story, but it should give us all a wake-up call. As Christians, we face numerous decisions, but only one is truly right. We must be obedient to God no matter what the consequences. We make choices as adults about who to marry, what job to have, how to raise our children, and most importantly, what ways God wants us to serve. We serve Him in every choice we make. There is no way to list them all.

We have many times in our lives when we have to make a choice. When we started *Pathway Christian Academy*, many people tried to talk us out of it. People we loved and cared about thought it was a wrong decision and a waste of resources. My husband and I had to choose between following what we felt God was leading us to do and listening to those who thought they were looking out for our best interests. Some got upset with us for our choices. We did not want to hurt them, but we had to be obedient.



How many times in your life have you been at a fork in the road? How many times have you had to decide what decision to make? Some decisions involve your children. We were always worried about being too strict. I regret many more of the yes's than I did the no's where my children were concerned. When we are asked to do something or go somewhere that we really know we shouldn't, but we don't want to hurt people's feelings, it can be a catastrophe. That "yes" that should have been a "no" can change a person's life.

It takes courage and obedience to do God's will, but it is the only way to please God. Just as it took courage for Samuel to speak to Eli, it will take courage for us to do the right thing. We will sometimes hurt others with the decisions we make. I am sure Mary was deeply hurt many times by yielding to God's will. She watched her son be beaten and crucified. She had a choice. She could have told the angel she didn't want to have God's son. *(Luke 1:38)*

What choices are we making? Are we responding to God's will, even though it may hurt ourselves or others? I can't imagine David running from Saul all those years. He knew he was God's anointed, but he had to run before he could reign. David could have said, "No, thank you," but he didn't. He accepted the call even though it was painful.

We must accept the call of God in our lives, just as others have done before us. We must choose obedience rather than comfort for ourselves or others. If we are to be in God's will, we must do what God has called us to do.

May we proclaim, ***"No matter what the consequences, Lord, I will be obedient and serve you!"***



*Dr. Worthington has five children and twelve grandchildren. She serves as Principal of Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.*

# Behind the Fence

*Dr. Glenn Mills*



*“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”*

**Matthew 6:6**

The Bible mentions giving, serving, praying, and working without seeking recognition from others. In His teachings on service, Jesus stated that those who serve others without seeking recognition would be regarded as the greatest. As you see in the above Scripture, Jesus said our prayers that are done in secret would be rewarded openly. And Jesus also said when it comes to work, it should be as unto the Lord and not unto men.

There are things we do as Christians others need to see, to give glory unto God and be a witness to them. But no matter what we do with the gifts, talents, and abilities God has given us, we must do all things to the glory of God (**I Corinthians 10:31**). I have

been saddened many times by people who use their gifts for their own glory or benefit and not God's. As Jesus said, they already have their reward from the praise of men. I can say without reserve; I had much rather have the abundant rewards of God than the limited rewards of men.

I was out mowing the yard a few days ago and something beautiful caught my eye. It was a single red rose that had grown through the fence and was blooming there all alone where I would most likely be the only one who would see it. The Holy Spirit had me stop for a moment so He could reveal a valuable lesson to me. He told me to go on the inside of the fence to see the rest of the rose bush. I entered the gate and there it was tucked in the corner of the lovely white painted fence that went around the pool area. The rose bush was in full bloom and very pretty indeed. What the Spirit showed me was how all the roses complimented each other and blended together. It would have been hard to pick just the right one.

It seems Christians can be much like that rose bush in the corner, surrounded by that pretty, white fence (*church building*). When we pray, sing, worship, praise, serve, give, study, witness, and attend just like any other believer, we are just another rose on the bush. But when we are willing to go outside the walls, to the not so pretty, rustic side of the fence (*world outside the church*), and bloom where no one is watching, then that makes us special. When we love and serve God wholeheartedly without seeking recognition, like the rose on the back side of the fence, we are most beautiful and special. Don't get me wrong, God loves all His children and will bless them for all they do in faith. His Word says He will be a debtor to no man. So yes, He truly blesses those who love and serve. But I do know He takes special notice to the rose who is willing to bloom behind the fence.

We must all ask ourselves why we do the spiritual things we do. Is it because it is just the right thing to do? Is it just another habit we were taught growing up? Is it because Heaven is a better option than Hell? Why do we serve God? Is it so we can get more from Him? Is it so others will pat us on the back? The only reason that is acceptable is that we love God first and foremost. That must be our one and only reason for serving God and others. When we love God, praying to Him, singing His praises, worship, thanksgiving, witnessing, giving, and service all come as a true revelation of that love.

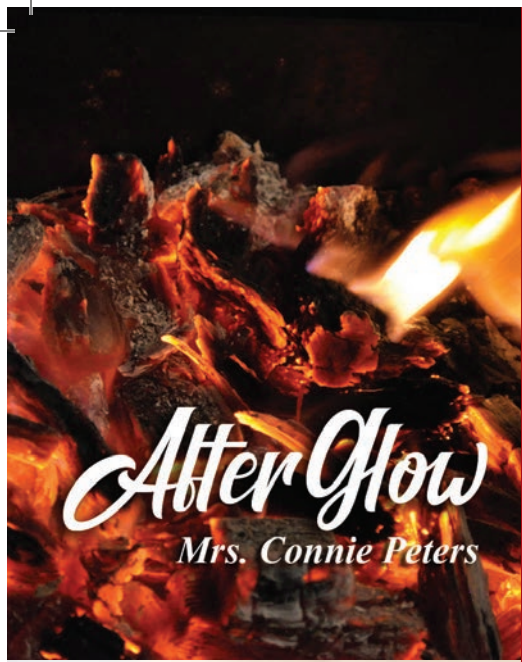
There is nothing more lovely than a believer who is completely in love with God. You can see it in most everything they say and do. Their conduct, behavior, attitude, character, dress, conversation, and more reveal their love for the Father. They don't compete with others in spiritual things. They seek only to please God with their total being. They don't teach, preach, pray, sing, praise, worship, dance, or shout like others may, but they serve and love God in ways others don't see. They understand what it is to be intimate with God. They know the closet, bed chamber relationship Jesus spoke about. They are singing without music or a praise team. They are worshipping at home, in the car, in the yard, in the garden and other places. They are reading, studying, and fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit.

They give over and beyond the tithe as they see others in need around them. They pray intently, humbly, patiently, expectantly, often, and with great joy. "Thank you, Father," is spoken from their lips several times a day. They judge themselves by God's Word to live rightly. They allow the Holy Spirit to convict and strengthen them. They guard their hearts and lips from evil. They don't just attend church on the inside of the beautifully painted fence that everyone sees. They are the Church on the backside of the not so pretty fence that often only God sees. I have no doubt you, my friend, are blooming for God. So, my question would simply be, on which side of the fence are you blooming?



*Dr. Glenn Mills is a long time supporter of GoMix Christian Radio and a full-time Evangelist with Glenn Mills Ministries. More information is available at [www.glennmillsministries.com](http://www.glennmillsministries.com)*

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# Our Father's Invitations

Listening to a recent message by Charles Stanley, I was intrigued by his encouragement to accept God's invitations as a means to know God better. I know that God has invited each of us to accept His Son's sacrifice for sin personally. But what other invitations occur in God's Word for us to accept? That thought prompted me to do a word study of the word come. A concordance revealed 2267 occurrences of come, become, comely, overcome, and other forms of come. Through my search, I found several applicable invitations.

Some invitations were given to specific people, but could be applied to us as well. For instance, God told Noah to come into the ark (**Genesis 7:1**) and He told Lot to come out of Sodom (**Genesis 19:22**). God also calls us to safety from the world. Jesus invited Peter to become part of a miracle (**Matthew 14:29**). Only our lack of faith limits our participation in miracles that are part of God's plan for us.

Other general invitations are given to each of us. We are invited to behold God's works (**Psalms 46:8; 66:5**); become fishers of men (**Mark 1:17**); to join Jesus at the rapture (**Revelation 4:1**); and to join the marriage supper of the Lamb (**Revelation 19:17**).

Some invitations are specifically to bring us into fellowship with God. God invites us to come to Him and reason through His truths and life's conundrums (**Isaiah 1:18**). Our risen Saviour invited the disciples to fellowship with Him (**John 21:12**). We are invited to come before the Lord to worship Him (**I Chronicles 16:29**). His invitations to come boldly for mercy and grace in time of need (**Hebrews 4:16**) and to come to Him for rest from our burdens (**Matthew 11:28; Mark 6:31**) have comforted many saints over the years. He invites us to come to Him for the refreshment of the water of life (**John 7:37; Revelation 22:17**).

All of those invitations are written in God's Word, but some of the most special invites are those that He impresses on our spirits to come aside from our cares and fellowship with Him now. Those moments are in direct communication with our needs at that time. Have you heard His urgings to fellowship with Him? Don't delay in answering those invitations. They are personal and timely. Ponder that!



*Mrs. Connie Peters has two children and resides in Princeton, NC. Now retired, she formerly served as an instructor at Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.*

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