

The Ministry of Harold Johne:
Missionary, Professor, Shepherd

CH 331

April 22, 2002

Nathan C. Buege

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I learned many things from my interview with Harold. He is a living example that a loving, Christian marriage is one of the greatest earthly blessings imaginable. What a treasure it is when husband and wife love one another and support one another spiritually! There is so much peace and security in this brand of marriage. Harold and Barbara Johnne selflessly love one another and look out for one another. They are best friends who speak rare jewels of godly wisdom to one another. These God-fearing words of love and forgiveness are better than any earthly riches.

Harold taught me some things about church life as well. He showed by his life’s examples that happiness in the parish depends largely upon the spiritual maturity of the congregation’s lay leadership. When the leaders are in the Word on a deep and personal level, there are an incredible number of blessings that result. Kingdom work multiplies fast! Trust between pastor and congregation grows and spreads. Forgiveness resounds in everyone’s hearts. All have their eyes on the heavenly goal.

However, not every station in his ministry was like this for Harold. From him I also learned that when the leaders of the church are not in the Word, the ministry suffers. Instead of kingdom work growing and multiplying, only bitterness and frustration grow. The leaders have only earthly goals in mind and make decisions according to these priorities. The ministry is kicked around and disrespected. In these situations, pastoral life can become a deep struggle. There is no doubt: a pastor's happiness in a particular parish depends largely on the number of church leaders who are in the Word. It seems like such an obvious conclusion, and yet it was striking for me to see the vastly differing results from those churches whose leaders were in the Word, and those who weren't.

Another practical piece of advice that I learned had to do with dealing with hard situations. How do you balance family and ministry during some of these times? Harold encouraged me to empathize with the sick and the hurting. Don't lose feeling for those people. Love them deeply. But, at the same time, don't let these kinds of situations poison all the other parts of your life. Learn how to empathize, go home from the hospital and enjoy your supper all in the same day.

Maybe the most impressive aspect of my interview with Harold Johnne was the emphasis he placed on his personal relationship with Jesus. A learned man, he still studies the Scriptures every day. He is an incredibly humble man who never stops learning. He never stops listening to God's Word and gets excited when he discovers something new. He never tires of hearing the story of salvation. Jesus drove his ministry from the Midwest to Japan to Africa for 48 years. Jesus guides the way he deals with his family members. Jesus rules in his heart now and forever. This made his interview a rare jewel.

Video Interview Questions

I. Introduction

- a) Graduation from WLS in 1953
- b) Served at three rural North Dakota churches from 1953-1957
- c) Served at St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, WI, 1957-1960
- d) Served at Emmanuel, St. Paul, MN, 1960-1969
- e) Served as a missionary to Japan, 1969-1986
- f) Served as WLS professor of the New Testament and homiletics, 1986-1998
- g) Served as a semi-retired pastor, Holy Word, Austin, TX, 1998-2001

II. Life growing up in Racine

- a) Where did you grow up?
- b) How did your family encourage/discourage you for the ministry?
 - 1) your father?
 - 2) your sister?
 - 3) your mother?
- c) Who encouraged you most to enter the ministry?
- d) While at Prep, did you like the classes that were designed for pastors?
- e) Did your struggles to learn languages in a systematic way carry over to struggling to learn Greek and Hebrew later?
- f) Did you consider any other occupation?
- g) Give me an example of a time when you were able to dabble in architecture.
- h) What was the one greatest reason you wanted to enter the ministry?
- i) Any other thoughts you would like to share about your boyhood pastor?
- j) Tell me about your courtship with Barbara.
- k) What are some of your personal strengths and weaknesses?

III. Life as a husband

- a) Can you put into words what your marriage means to you?
- b) How has your marriage matured over the years?
- c) Has your ministry enhanced or taken away from your marriage?
- d) How have you and Barb encouraged one another spiritually?

IV. Life as a father

- a) What is your philosophy about resolving the tensions between family and ministry?
- b) What kind of blessings do you enjoy today through your children?
- c) Some thoughts from Pastor John's children concerning their dad.
- d) How did you govern your family's devotional life?

V. Life in rural North Dakota

- a) What do you remember about life in North Dakota?
- b) What did you do during your first year of ministry? What took up most of your time?
- c) How many calls did you receive while there?
- d) How did your mentor Paul Kuehl help you?

VI. Life in Beaver Dam, WI

- a) Why was your time in Beaver Dam the most difficult time of your ministry?
- b) What struggles did you face?
- c) How did the LORD grant you relief from your struggles?
- d) What kept you from resigning during those years?
- e) Which of those struggles were the hardest for you?
- f) What did you learn from Beaver Dam concerning joy in the ministry?

VII. Life in St. Paul, MN

- a) How did your associate in St. Paul help you recover?
- b) How did your family adjust to living in a big city for the first time?
- c) How did you handle your council member's suicide?
- d) What was it like to be a pastor as Wisconsin and Missouri split ways?

VIII. Life as a missionary

- a) Tell me about your deliberation of your call to Japan.
- b) What were the greatest struggles you faced as a missionary?
- c) What were the greatest blessings you received?
- d) What cultural barriers are there to gospel ministry in Japan?
- e) How did the experience in Japan affect Mona, your only child born in Japan?
- f) How did Mona's struggles continue after the move to Mequon?
- g) How were Mona's struggles finally resolved?

IX. Life as a Seminary professor

- a) What was your greatest joy in being a Seminary professor?
- b) When you started, did anything surprise you about life as a professor?
- c) Shifting gears, what did you learn while on your sabbatical to Africa?

X. Life in Texas

- a) What one thing did you enjoy most about your years in Austin?

XI. Life as a retiree back in Racine

- a) When you reflect upon 48 years of ministry, what wide-spanning observations do you see?

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