

September/October 2018 • \$3.95

# FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

## Making Entertainment Choices



# Making Entertainment Choices



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Our sincere thanks to Dr. Kevin Schaal for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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# Prove It!

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

1 Thessalonians 5:21–22

I have a secret passion. I grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, and as a child of the 1970s I became a rabid Phoenix Suns fan. Do not laugh at me! I know things have not been going well for my team lately. But the passion still exists. I could easily spend all day, if my life allowed, reading articles, talking about the team, and watching clips and highlights. It is an entertainment part of my life; but if I am not careful, it could become a dominant part of my life.

I remember watching the Suns lose a playoff game a number of years ago and being so bothered (disappointed, angered) by their being bumped that I started to get a little depressed. The next day I watched several interviews with players and ashamedly realized that I was more bothered by their loss than they were! I immediately became convicted that something was wrong, not with them but with me, especially as a Christian. I needed to step back and evaluate my interest in sports. In the subsequent years I have watched very few full games. It's not that watching ballgames is sin, but it had become something beyond appropriate for me. I had to consider my sports consumption in the light of 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

First Thessalonians 5:22 is one of the most misapplied verses in all of Scripture. We often use it to offer a proof text for abstaining from things that might be misunderstood to be sinful (but are not necessarily). That is not what this verse is saying.

There is a logical sequence here. It begins with a simple command: "Prove all things." The idea is to put everything to the test. Use discernment, evaluate, and make deliberate choices. The object of the test is described by the most inclusive word Paul could possibly have used—"all." Test everything. Make a judgment about everything. All areas of life and ministry are in view. Nothing is exempt. Believers are required by God to biblically evaluate everything in their lives and then respond accordingly. This would include entertainment.

These verses are about responding to the moral substance of things and the moral impact

of things, not just the perception of those things to others. Once the judgment is made, hold onto the good things and avoid the evil things wherever they might appear.

There are places for entertainment and leisure activities in the Christian life, but we must pursue these things with biblical discernment. Our choices must be informed by more than what everyone else is doing or by what we like to do. Even Christians seem to think the standard of "like" is somehow appropriate. "Testing" means that we must dig deeper. Why do I like it? What is it in me that likes what I am seeing or doing? Is it my sinful, carnal self? Or is what I am doing lending itself toward more noble virtues commended by the Scripture? Is what I am watching or listening to an innocent momentary diversion (and rest) from the rigors of my everyday reality, or am I using it as an inappropriate escape from the appropriate stewardship of my real life before God? (This is what I concluded my sports obsession had become.) We have to learn to be honest with ourselves about why we like what we like.

Once we start thinking critically and biblically, whole genres of entertainment become hard to justify. For example, how can the blood and gore of horror films appeal to anything good or produce anything good in me? Music that glorifies violence, immorality, and rebellion is in the same category.

"But beauty is in the eye of the beholder!" some would claim. Says who? Is that what Scripture claims? Philippians 4:8 commands us to meditate on what is lovely or pleasing. Surely Paul is not telling us to do what is right or whatever is lovely in our own eyes. Doing what is right in our own eyes is the mark of rebellion against God (Judges 17:6). God has defined for us what is beautiful both morally and aesthetically in His Word and in creation itself. Our goal ought to be to bring our loves in line with His and then truly enjoy what is pleasing to Him.

So that is what this issue of *FrontLine* is about. We want to challenge God's people to be more biblically discerning about their entertainment choices. We trust it will be helpful.

Kevin Schaal

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I'm so excited to read *FrontLine* this month ["Teach Us to Pray"]. I've owned the Ruth Bumgardner prayer journal since last October and am trying to grow in that area. Thanks for putting it together.

*Christina Heffernan  
Simpsonville, SC*

I did want to thank [the donor] for the *FrontLine* renewal subscription. It is a blessing to receive here on the mission field of Saskatchewan, Canada. We minister to the Cree (Indians, rather—Native or First Nations they prefer). To have access to these articles from those who still stand strong is a great encouragement.

*Mike Flannery  
Mistawasis Reserve  
Saskatchewan, Canada*

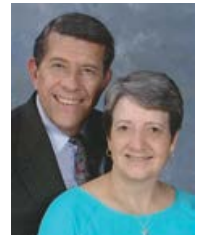
Thank you for this article ["Physical Abuse in Marriage," published on Proclaim and Defend]. I haven't seen a biblical approach to spousal abuse stating so clearly as in yours. I saw in the comments of the lady who received bad counsel and support from her pastor and church back in the '80s, and it is just heartbreaking when believers and church leaders want to help, but they are ignorant and scared to properly go about the situation. Thank you for . . . your ministry. I feel a little more prepared now if/when I run into a difficult situation as this.

*Chris Koehn  
Oro Valley, AZ*

Thank you for sending copies of the *FrontLine* magazine to Nairobi, Kenya! As soon as we make them available, they disappear and are thoroughly read. Resources like *FrontLine* are rare indeed in Nairobi. The students and staff at East Africa Baptist School of Theology greatly benefit from understanding what their Bible-believing brethren on the other side of the world think about the issues of our day. Dr. Minnick's *Sound Words* section is inflexibly challenging and edifying. "Bring . . . the Books" articles are reliably helpful as well. . . . Thank you for serving the body of Christ around the world with this magazine.

*Daniel Huffstutler  
Director, East Africa Baptist School of Theology  
Nairobi, Kenya*

**Harold Burkholder** has recently accepted the position of senior pastor at North Baptist Church in Flint, Michigan. He and his wife, Susan, have relocated from Greenville, South Carolina, where he was on staff at Bob Jones University. Pastor Burkholder and North Baptist are actively searching for an associate pastor/music director. This position involves leading the choir and music program of the church and overseeing outreach ministries. If interested, contact [info@northbaptistflint.com](mailto:info@northbaptistflint.com).



Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary announced the addition of **Mark Herbster** to the Maranatha family beginning in the summer of 2018. Mark serves as the new dean of Maranatha Baptist Seminary and of the School of Bible and Church Ministries. In addition to his role as a dean, Mark will also be heavily involved in student discipleship. As he maintains a speaking ministry in local churches, youth conferences, and educator conventions, he will also be recruiting and promoting the university.

**Curt and Bev Doherty** at the TW Quarter Circle Ranch Ministries have an equestrian ministry in Greenville, South Carolina, sharing the gospel of Christ, discipling believers, and serving as a bridge to local independent Baptist churches.



Staff and volunteers are trained in the Exchange relational evangelism and discipleship program and currently have about twenty people, ages eleven through adult, in small or one-on-one Bible studies. TWQC has completed sixteen years of summer horsemanship camps and six years of Ranch Ministry Apprenticeship. For more information, go to [twqc.org](http://twqc.org).

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# Our Hearts on Display

Christian discipleship must change what we love. The New Testament places significant emphasis on the need for the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). And it equally stresses the need for the reformation of our behavior, pursuing a life lived in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:3).

But a changed mind and changed actions without changed loves is a stunted Christianity. At best, heartless Christianity is a grinding drudgery. At worst, attempting to live as a Christian without loving Christ is a hypocritical sham: a man professes faith and keeps God's commandments while his heart loves the present world (2 Tim. 4:10). In all our zeal to teach our mind and train our obedience, our discipleship will falter if we do not reorder our hearts.

We can see the need for changing what we love in Paul's prayer for the Philippians (1:9–11):

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Read Paul's petition from end to beginning. If his prayer is answered, the Philippians will glorify God, which is the chief purpose of man. They will glorify God by growing in righteousness, being sincere and without offense. But how does one attain to such holy living?

The answer is found in Paul's core prayer for them: that their love would both *grow* and *grow in discernment*. He wants their love to abound, but also to abound in judgment. The mark of such judgment is that they set their approval on those things that truly are excellent. They have learned to delight in those things that are worthy of delight.



## Entertainment and Delight

What has this to do with our entertainment? Our entertainment choices express what we delight in. There is much in our lives that is, to one degree or another, obligatory. We must be at work for certain hours each day, doing tasks that we may or may not enjoy. The grass must be cut regardless of our desires. No one (to my knowledge) sits in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles for the sheer exhilaration of it.

Our entertainment, by contrast, is voluntary, and so our entertainment is especially revealing of our hearts. A man might go to work entirely out of obligation, but his hobbies are freely chosen. If we find our entertainment tedious, we are free to abandon it entirely. We expect our hobbies to bring us a measure of joy. We pursue them for exactly this reason. Our minds drift to our hobbies when we're engaged in our ordinary work. We look forward to the opportunity to devote time to their pursuit.

For this reason, what entertains us puts our hearts on display. Our hobbies indicate what brings us joy. There is a difference between hearing a vulgar joke and stifling laughter on the one hand, and hearing the same joke and truly finding it repulsive. While both responses might demonstrate knowledge that a Christian ought not to find humor in such things, the latter response indicates a more mature set of loves. Our hobbies are one test to determine whether we are approving that which is excellent.

So what we find enjoyable tells us about our loves, but this is no one-way street. Our entertainment does not merely reveal our loves; by changing our entertainments, we *shape* our loves. We all know people who have disciplined themselves to embrace new loves. Consider the person who begins to run for exercise. Almost certainly, the early days of running are less than enjoyable. Indeed, those runs cause far more pain than pleasure. But the one who endures the early struggles may reach a point at which he actually enjoys running. The same is true of other changes: a healthy diet, perhaps, or the learning of a foreign language.

And this is why the quality of what entertains us matters: because it changes what we love. Let's consider another very familiar passage from Philippians, oft-cited when discussing these issues: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

We might spend time debating whether this or that specific entertainment is truly lovely or praiseworthy, but that is not my intention here. Rather, I merely wish to point out that this passage obligates us to give attention to that question with regard to our entertainment. Paul's command makes a grand assumption: some things truly are pure and true and of good report. Such qualities are not "in the eye of the beholder." However we apply Philippians 4:8, we cannot read Paul as saying, "Think on whatever *you* think is lovely." Such a reading empties his words of any meaningful authority.

Indeed, there is a connection between Paul's prayer in Philippians 1 and his command in Philippians 4. In both cases, the goal is that we would love those things *worthy* of being loved. That is the point of approving what is excellent. So we cannot avoid the question: are those things that we delight in, that we set our approval on, excellent?

This does not mean that our hobbies must be overtly Christian. It does mean that our entertainment is for us an opportunity to cultivate disciplines and tastes suitable to those who are being remade into the image of Jesus Christ.

## Some Cautions

What makes for excellent entertainment? What kinds of hobbies are suitable to a child of God?

We should be ready to admit that hobbies and entertainments that provoke us to delight in sin must be abandoned. In my judgment, this is a serious obstacle to the enjoyment of most of what is produced in movies and television. Whether the programs invite us to be amused by depravity or whether they reflect a worldview in which God's justice is flouted, no one can allow himself to be shaped by such entertainment while making serious effort at Christlikeness.

We ought to be suspicious of the kinds of entertainments that are designed to appeal to—and therefore reinforce—the hummingbird-like attention spans characteristic of our age. If we would agree that disciplines like prayer and Bible reading and sermon listening and worship demand sustained attention, we ought not to set our hearts on things that increasingly make those things more difficult for us. Many worthwhile hobbies have value precisely because they demand increasing levels of discipline.

Sports lend themselves to such discipline, for instance. In this, I do not find it surprising that Paul uses athletic metaphors for Christian living: boxing and running (1 Cor. 9:26). Caution is needed here: we must acknowledge that we live in a culture in which sports are idols.

We can also promote discipline through hobbies which involve craftsmanship. To be entertained by that which requires us to focus, whether by serious music, or by nature, or by an intricate task—all these things mold our character in ways conducive to Christian discipleship.

Worthwhile hobbies will also aid us in building meaningful relationships with believers and unbelievers alike. In a world of isolated enjoyment, we ought to seek out entertainments that enable us to get to know other people. Here, I'm reminded of C. S. Lewis's observation that "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'" Such shared loves create a *fellowship*, a sharing together in a mutual interest. These connections are worthwhile for their own sake, but they also create opportunities to share the gospel and to provoke fellow believers to love and good works.

Our hobbies express our loves, and our hobbies *shape* our loves. Our hobbies, then, must be subject to biblical scrutiny.

Dr. Michael Riley has been the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church since March of 2012. Before coming to Wakefield, Michigan, he served at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and International Baptist College of Chandler, Arizona.







# The Wise Use of Social Media

In 1962 an MIT professor wrote the first description of what we now call “the Internet.” His “Galactic Network” concept envisioned “the social interactions that could be enabled through [computer] networking.”<sup>1</sup> Long before Facebook’s launch in 2004, those who designed the World Wide Web anticipated these social interactions. So what we now call “social media” (and “social networking”<sup>2</sup>) grew naturally out of this fertile ground. Current projections indicate that there will be more than three billion active users of social media by 2021!<sup>3</sup> Some believers denounce all online social networking; others use it every day. None of us wants to create a stumbling block for others. But “when we insist that God must loathe a certain human activity though His thoughts are hidden, we offer conjectures, not facts.”<sup>4</sup> Social media can be an amazing tool; for many it is an amusing toy. In our culture, we need God’s wisdom to know how to use these electronic links. As Christians we can use the Book of Proverbs to know how to wisely use these social media sites. Here are a few examples.

## Wisdom vs. Wasting Time

*“Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth” (Prov. 17:24).*

Even on social media, discerning people still seek to find wisdom. But the Web places millions of new vistas before the fool whose eyes are on “the ends of the earth.” That

second phrase highlights the dangers of distraction. John Kitchen commented about this verse that “the ‘ends of the earth’ is a metaphorical way of referring to all the far-flung fantasies of a mind that is never at rest. His attention never settles on one thing.”<sup>5</sup> A survey of more than five hundred adults who use smart phones illustrated the distractions of social media. More than half of the respondents checked social media ten times per day, spending ten-to-twenty minutes per visit.<sup>6</sup> (Do the math; that’s an average of more than two hours each day!) If “in the multitude of words” sin is not found wanting,<sup>7</sup> what about the multitude of websites?<sup>8</sup> The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; God-fearing people know how to use wisdom on the Web. Those who fear the Lord know that they must not entertain themselves with the very sins for which Christ died. And the dangerous misuse of discretionary time is magnified on social media. David used his leisure time wisely in 2 Samuel 7 and was honored by the Lord for his discernment and godly desire. Four chapters later, David used his downtime in a way that nearly destroyed him, indulging his lust. Discerning people will set their faces toward wisdom, especially on social media.

## Longing for “Likes”

*“It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory” (Prov. 25:27).*

Too much honey can make you sick; so does seeking honor for yourself. Like those who seek to sit in the most



prominent places,<sup>9</sup> many seek affirmations and honor. But beware! The “self-esteem flu” will make you sick at heart. This is what comes of searching for your own glory.

The history of social media shows us that human hearts still search for honor in all the wrong places. One author observed, “Mark Zuckerberg said recently that he wants Facebook to be about ‘loving people we serve,’ but too often his site and its peers seem far more interested in helping the people they serve to seek the love they crave.”<sup>10</sup> Marion K. Underwood, a clinical psychologist at the University of Texas at Dallas, commented, “It is stressful to constantly be monitoring, to be worrying about what people—how people might have responded to what you’ve put online. [Thirteen-year-olds are] an age group that has a lot of anxiety about where they fit in, how they rank, what their peer status is. But they don’t just get online to see how many likes or favorites they got. They’re comparing their numbers to other people’s numbers.”<sup>11</sup> Many of the teens in the study indicated that they checked their social media sites one hundred times per day!<sup>12</sup> Please help the next generation see the dangers of “longing for ‘likes.’”

### Unnecessary Conflict

*“He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears”* (Prov. 26:17).

The Jewish people looked upon dogs as unclean; most of them were wild. Seizing one by the ears would invite a bad bite. Social media gives you far too many opportunities to get a bad bite by meddling in quarrels in which you have no part. Bruce Waltke commented that “the senseless busybody should leave the passing cur alone, and the disciple should walk away from a dispute in which he has no interest.”<sup>13</sup>

*“It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling”* (Prov. 20:3).

Social media enables scandalous meddling; in fact, it seems to thrive on it. If you are not careful, you will be drawn into a dispute to “defend your honor” when you sense that you have been slighted. But this proverb tells you where real honor is found: it comes by avoiding strife. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger,”<sup>14</sup> especially on social media. Be honorable; don’t meddle on social media.

### Your Sphere of Influence

*“The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom”* (Prov. 10:21).

You could use social media like a shepherd to minister to others. Your wise posts could feed others with the life-giving wisdom of the Word. Silliness on Snapchat won’t satisfy; foolishness on Facebook simply makes things worse. If you are going to use social media, be sure to include meditations from the Scriptures to help others grow.

As Christians, let’s use Proverbs to know how to wisely use these social-media sites. Among my friends on Facebook, I am most grateful for those who share scriptural insights. Their wise posts have strengthened thousands of others with the Word of God. More than a

decade ago, when I first accessed social media, I decided to read what others were writing before I began posting. Much of what I read seemed useless. Sometimes I was shocked by what I read. I found myself thinking, “You aren’t thinking about the Scripture verse that I’m thinking about right now, or you would never have published that post.” I also wondered, “Didn’t your mother ever teach you not to do that?” Then I realized that my mother had never addressed many of these issues. But the Book of Proverbs, like a perfect parent, does give us wisdom about these social interactions.

Gordon Dickson serves as the senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio. He is working on a book on the use of Proverbs in social media.



<sup>1</sup> “Brief History of the Internet,” Internet Society, 1997, describing the memos of J.C.R. Licklider, accessed at <https://www.internetsociety.org/internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet/>.

<sup>2</sup> Danah Boyd defines “social network sites” as “networked publics” which are “the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice” (Danah Boyd, “Taken Out of Context, American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics,” fall 2008; doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of California, Berkeley, accessed at <https://www.danah.org/papers/TakenOutOfContext.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> Social media statistics and facts accessed at <https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/>. About seventy percent of the US population currently has at least one social media account.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Hand, *Upright Downtime: Making Wise Choices about Entertainment*, Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008, 96.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs*, Mentor Imprint, Christian Focus Publications, 2006, 386.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Steingold, “Instabrain: Nearly 6 in 10 Adults Check Social Media at Least 10 Times A Day!,” StudyFinds, March 15, 2018, accessed at <https://www.studyfinds.org/half-americans-use-social-media-ten-times-day/>.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 10:19.

<sup>8</sup> Several years ago, as I was studying an excellent online theological article about the genealogy of Christ, a pop-up ad kept blinking away. When I finally read the ad, it was an invitation to consult a psychic! Talk about distraction.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 14:7–11.

<sup>10</sup> Feiler, Bruce, “For the Love of Being Liked,” *New York Times*, May 9, 2014, accessed April 25, 2017 ([https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/fashion/for-some-social-media-users-an-anxiety-from-approval-seeking.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/fashion/for-some-social-media-users-an-anxiety-from-approval-seeking.html?_r=0)).

<sup>11</sup> “Being 13: Inside the Secret World of Teens,” *CNN Special Reports with Anderson Cooper*, December 1, 2015. Dr. Underwood’s study included 150,000 social media posts. Accessed on April 25, 2017, at <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1512/01/csr.01.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 15–31*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005, 359.

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 15:1.



# Does Your Media Presence

*Over time, things change.  
Society changes slowly.  
Fashion changes quickly.  
Technology seems to change every second.  
God does not change.  
God's Word does not change.  
God's Word is relevant for us today.  
God has not changed His mind about moral excellence  
and moral purity since the beginning of time.  
Neither should we.*

Unlike many technologically challenged church leaders today, our technologically unchallenged young people and young couples in our churches are asking, "What does God's Word have to say about the digital world that we live in? Just show me a chapter and verse that has anything to say about cell phones, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, game systems, or e-mails!" A quick look into *Strong's Concordance* will leave you hard-pressed to find any of the above-mentioned items.

We need to recognize that . . .

- There are more than one billion cell-phone users worldwide.
- China's mobile-phone market, the world's biggest, has over 400 million users.
- The average American spends almost five hours a day on a mobile device.
- More than 60 million teenagers now carry cell phones, and most take them everywhere they go.

When we look at all this new technology, we must remember that God's Word is and has always been profitable (useful) for any time or age. We cannot isolate ourselves from the world, but we can apply Bible principles to help insulate us from the world's evil. A thorough study and meditation of many common passages will open many simple yet life-changing principles for the digital world we live in. If we truly love God, we will ask ourselves, "Does my media presence mirror the Word of God?"

How do parents answer a thirteen-year-old son or daughter who asks, "Mom? Dad? Can I have a cell phone, get Facebook, and start an Instagram account?" Instead of saying, "No way! Not until you are forty!," Philippians 4:8 gives a wise option for parents: "Good question. We wondered when you were going to ask. Here is what we can do. For the next two weeks, we want you to memorize, study, and examine every word and phrase in Philippians 4:8. In two weeks, we will sit down and walk through the eight principles in this verse. It can be a checklist for your media use. If you disobey any of the eight Bible principles, you will lose your media privileges for one month. Deal?"

(Note: Now the teen is not just afraid of upsetting Mom or Dad with disobedience, but he knows he will be willfully disobeying God's Word and displeasing his Lord.)

Let's look closely at God's practical checklist in Philippians 4:8 for all of our media devices.

## Is It True?

Have you ever lied online? Have you lied about your age, your looks, your accomplishments, or your relationship with God?

- Proverbs 12:22: "Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight."
- John 8:44: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

## Is It Honorable?

Have you ever dishonored your parents with your friends online? Have you ever dishonored God by refusing to take a stand for Him online?

- Ephesians 6:1-3: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."
- Proverbs 20:20: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."

## Is It Fair?

Have you been fair to your friends by talking to them before talking to others?

- Proverbs 11:13: "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."
- Proverbs 26:20: "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."

## Is It Pure?

Have you involved yourself in impure conversations? Have you downloaded or uploaded pictures that would cause impure thinking? Do you filter your computer to keep you away from the constant invitations to porn sites?

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how



# Mirror the Word of God?

to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God."

- Ephesians 5:3–7: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them."

## Is It Lovely?

Have you ever been ugly or unkind to authorities or friends in your wall-to-wall conversations? Are you viewing YouTube videos that are inappropriate?

- Ephesians 4:31–32: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."
- Colossians 3:12–13: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

## Is It Good?

Could your testimony be weakened or destroyed by any of your recent conversations or posts? Is there anything in your online world that you would be embarrassed for other family or church members to find out?

- Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."
- Proverbs 15:23: "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

## Is It Excellent?

Have you lost your spirit of excellence by compromising your positions on sin? Have you become mediocre in your walk with God because of the inordinate time you spend communicating with your friends rather than God?

- 2 Peter 1:3–5: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge."
- 1 Corinthians 10:23: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

## Is It Praiseworthy to God?

Do you please God with what you say? Do you please God with the type of friends you choose? Do you please God with the time you spend with Him compared to the time you spend with your friends?

- 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."
- Psalm 100:4–5: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."

God's Word is still profitable (useful) to encourage all of us to keep our walk with God strong as we travel through our digital world. If your media presence mirrors God's Word, go for it. If not, be careful.

*Over time, things change.*

*Society changes slowly.*

*Fashion changes quickly.*

*Technology seems to change every second.*

*God does not change.*

*God's Word does not change.*

*God's Word is relevant for us today.*

*God has not changed His mind about moral excellence and moral purity since the beginning of time.*

*Neither should we.*

Rand Hummel serves as the director of The Wilds of New England.



For further reading:

*The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn

*Lest You Fall: Meditations to Fight Moral Impurity* by Rand Hummel

*The Dark Side of the Internet* by Rand Hummel



# Anything for a Laugh

*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.*  
Proverbs 17:22

We love to laugh, and laughing can be good—but not all laughing is good. There are different kinds of laughs. The Old Testament Hebrew even uses different words for the different types. Our English is more limited.

The *laugh of surprise* erupts at the twist of a joke or even just something completely unexpected. Sarah laughed like this (Gen. 18:12). When the messenger told Abram she would have a son, she laughed. I really do not think it was the evil laugh of derision or mockery but rather the laugh of incredulity and surprise. A mental image jumped to Sarah's mind of her aging body, great with child. It struck her as impossible and amusing.

The *laugh of mockery* or derision is the type of “laughing to scorn” that the onlookers exhibited in Psalm 22:7. We find it often in Scripture where God's people are suffering. It is a laugh that enjoys another's misfortune and takes joy in being “above” them. This type of laughter can range from poking fun at ourselves to the darkest types of evil.

Solomon calls the *laughter of mirth*—or silliness—“madness” (Eccles. 2:2). This type of “partying” laugh is often expressed in ridiculous behavior and aided by intoxication.

*Nervous laughter* is a means of covering up discomfort while crossing the line of “sacredness.” American comedians have been doing this for years, and it is now the *modus operandi* of Christian comedians. A Bible example of this is hard to find because Scripture treats sacred things as, well, sacred and not as comical.

The most wonderful type of laugh is the *laugh of pure joy*. It is not the result of surprise or superiority but of hope fulfilled. This is the laugh Sarah enjoys after the birth of Isaac when she says, “God hath made me to laugh” (Gen. 21:6).

As Christians, laughter is part of our human experience, part of the way God made us, but we must be careful to make sure that even our humor reflects godliness. The rise of Christian comedy should force us to evaluate our laughter in the light of true godliness. Today's Christian comedy often crosses the line in these ways.

## Irreverence

Peter said that we are required to pass the time of temporary travel here on this planet in reverence (1 Pet. 1:17). He was not talking about worship only. He meant that our entire lives ought to represent a sense of reverence for the Almighty.

Generally, American Christians are theologically illiterate. (See “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy by Albert Mohler.†) Even the most learned of laypeople know much more about Bible stories than Bible doctrine—especially theology proper. If we really knew what God is like, we would not speak and act the way we do. Millard Erickson, discussing the practical implications of the doctrine of the transcendence, says this:

Reverence is appropriate in our relationship with God. Some worship, rightfully stressing the joy and confidence that the believer has in relationship to him as a living heavenly Father, goes beyond that point to an excessive familiarity treating him as an equal, or even worse, as a servant. If we have grasped the fact of the



divine transcendence, however, this will not happen. While there are room and need for enthusiasm of expression, and perhaps even an exuberance, that should never lead to a loss of respect (*Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 289).

Popular Christian comedy often crosses this line. In a convocation service at Liberty University, Tim Hawkins led into his comedy routine with this monologue.

We did not come to mess around tonight. We came to rock the flock, that's what we came to do. We came to jaaaaam for the lah-ah-ah-amb [lamb baa-ing noises]. That's what we came to do. We came to give you the flavah of the Savior. That's what we came to do. That was a Christian twerk right there, a little Christian twerk. That's not a sin. That's not a sin. You go out farther than that, that's a sin. You stay right here in the pocket, that's Christian-sanctioned twerk right there.

Fundamentalists don't have Tim Hawkins for concerts. They just watch him privately on YouTube. And much of what he says is genuinely and innocently funny. But edgy laughter—that nervous “wow, I cannot believe he said that” laughter—is usually an indicator of something not pleasing to God. I think I can safely say that Tim Hawkins will not perform that bit in heaven. I am not trying to pick on one guy. He is just an easy example. This touches all of us. This irreverent spirit permeates the entire entertainment culture of Christianity, and it is wrong. It is not a sin to laugh, and there is redeeming merit at poking fun at ourselves. But God is not a joke. His name is not funny. We serve a Holy God. He demands to be loved, revered, and feared. He said so (Rom. 3:18; 2 Cor. 7:1; Rev. 15:4). This is not just an Old Testament concept.

## Unkindness

Christian comedy can also be just downright mean-spirited—having fun at someone else's expense. As preachers we have learned to be careful of this when we preach. It is not appropriate for us to make fun of our wives, children, or friends. It's a tricky business. It's not wrong to tell a funny story. But it is wrong to be demeaning (Eph. 4:32). It takes some discernment to know the difference. When I was a child it was fairly common practice for some preachers to make their wives the butt of their jokes from the pulpit. My mother would writhe in indignation for these godly women who were being publicly humiliated by their husbands for the sake of a laugh. She told me that if I ever became a preacher, I should never, ever do it. As far as I know, I haven't.

## Arrogance

Comedy can easily become irreverent or unkind, but it can also be just plain arrogant. Arrogant laughter is a form of the scorn of superiority. It cannot be godly humility to present yourself as the cool guy and everyone

# We must live with care, talk with care, and watch and listen with care.

else as idiots (Rom. 12:3). Christian entertainment (and some preaching I have heard) crosses this line regularly. It's all wrapped together in the “cool Christian” culture. As popular culture encroaches on our daily choices, Christians desire more and more to live in it and partake of it. It is so tempting to want to be hip, popular, “in,” and even sexy. But as a sincere believer I should be asking

myself before God at least two very important questions. What part of my nature is wanting to express itself or be entertained in this way? And does this truly please God? I am not presuming an answer for you. You will have to discern that for yourself.

## So, What Should We Do as Christian Leaders?

Teach people about God. It has been our practice to preach against what is wrong, and we do need to do that in order to clarify. But we must communicate *why* it is wrong. The reasons are rooted in the holy nature of God Himself. People need to understand holiness, justice, righteousness, transcendence, immanence, love, immensity, grace, and mercy. How will they know unless someone teaches them? How will they be taught unless we purposefully plan to teach? Every worship service should be doctrinally focused upon God and profoundly reverent. We have to teach these truths over and over and over again.

We must live with care, talk with care, and watch and listen with care.

We need to be discerning about whom we set before our eyes, or our children's eyes, as positive examples of Christian living. Cultural popularity is no biblical standard. Lifestyle matters as much as the words spoken. When we use the world's standard of popularity, seeking Christian celebrities to inspire us, we adopt the error of the world. We create a form of Christian worldliness. Kenneth Myers says that the result is that instead of being “in the world, but not of the world,” we create a Christian culture that is “of the world, but not in the world” (*All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* [Crossway, 1989], 17–23).

We love to laugh. It is wonderful in its appropriate context, but we also need to take seriously Paul's condemnation of those who “not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom. 1:32). *This is not legalism*. It is not about the rules. It is about our heart attitude toward our holy God. It is about desiring to please Him above any worldly pleasures that we might desire for ourselves.

Kevin Schaal, FBFI president, graduated from Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina, with a BA in 1984. He then earned an MDiv from Calvary Baptist Seminary of Lansdale, Pennsylvania, in 1987, and a DMin from International Baptist College, Tempe, Arizona, in 1995. He has served as the pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church since its beginning in 1987.



\* <https://albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4/>

# The Christian Uses of

## Ever play “mismatched maxims?”

The idea is to find two widely accepted sayings that appear to contradict each other. For example, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop,” but “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” So which is true?

From a Christian perspective, both are. The Bible praises hard workers and rebukes sluggards (Prov. 6:6–11; 13:4). At the same time, it values rest. Israel was commanded to observe one day in seven as a day of rest (Exod. 20:8), and, while Christians are not bound to strict Sabbath observance, the principle of rest has never been rescinded. Indeed, God Himself rested (Gen. 2:1–3) and is evidently still resting from His work of creation (Heb. 4:4–10).

In other words, the Bible places a premium upon both labor and leisure. We earn our bread in the sweat of our faces. We still have a responsibility, first articulated at Creation, to exercise dominion over the earth and subdue it. Our work, however, needs to be punctuated by periods of leisure during which we enjoy God and His good gifts.

### Leisure

What is leisure? Even now, with all our labor-saving devices, we use most of our time just staying alive. Basic functions such as eating and sleeping take time. We spend many waking hours working for the means of life. We consume yet more time discharging legal duties, maintaining our homes and cars, and fulfilling other obligations. We also (if we are Christians) spend time in personal and corporate Bible study and worship—these are part of our calling, necessities, not options. Leisure is simply the time that is left over—time that we can spend however we wish.

Unfilled, leisure is tedious. Killing time is a hard job, as anybody who has spent a day loafing at work should know. Leisure demands to be filled, or it quickly palls and turns into monotony. No one remains completely idle for long. We all use our time to *do* something.

For Christians, the use of leisure is no small matter. Our vocation includes a stewardship of time—not merely the minutes and hours, but the occasions and opportunities. We are told to buy these up because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15–17). In the text, “redeeming the time” is probably

equivalent to “walking circumspectly.” In both we must reject folly, pursuing wisdom and discerning what the Lord wishes of us.

Leisure is one of our greatest resources and one of our worst curses. Used wrongly it dulls us mentally and spiritually, opening occasions for temptation. Used rightly, however, it sharpens us, enlivens us, and equips us to be more useful than we would be if we worked all the time.

### Amusements and Receptions

How do people use their leisure? Many try to fill it with amusements. Amusements are diversions or distractions, intended to engross our attention so as to stave off boredom. They include (among others) video games, television programs, sporting events, and light reading. Not all amusements are intrinsically wrong, but they are not intrinsically good either. At best they are fillers during moments between activities or between activity and rest, but they are neither productive nor restful. They are the temporal equivalent of empty calories. Worse, they often seek to gain or hold our attention by appealing to coarser appetites. Consequently, they have the power to degrade us.

Amusements can be distinguished from recreations. By definition, recreations are restorative. They return us to a state of wellbeing when our normal work has worn us down. They take us away from our usual routine of activity and redirect our energies into some refreshing pursuit. A recreation may be as simple as a drive in the country. It may involve a round of golf or an afternoon on the basketball court. Fishing and hunting are popular recreations. Some find recreation in reading a good book or listening to good music. Others choose to travel as a form of recreation. Shared recreations can strengthen our relationships as they restore us individually. They are a form of play. Like work (and unlike amusements), they engage the mind, the body or both. Unlike much work, they captivate us because they delight us.

Oddly enough, however, some activities may turn out to be restorative even when we do not enjoy them. This happens when we work hard in areas that are outside our normal routine. For example, a businessman who spends a





# Leisure

weekend baling hay for a family member might discover that both mind and body are better prepared to face the office on Monday. Whether he enjoys the work is almost beside the point. The activity removes his mind and body from their normal routines, providing them with the opportunity to recuperate from their normal stresses.

## Entertainment, Avocation, Service

Another use of leisure is entertainment. Many people assume that amusement, recreation, and entertainment are the same thing, but each has its own emphasis. Properly speaking, we entertain people when we bring them into our household so that they eat with us, live with us, and join our lives for some period of time. That time may be as brief as an hour or two. It may be as long as months. The point is that while people are being entertained they are taken out of their own world and inserted into someone else's.

By extension, *entertainment* includes those activities that bring us into someone else's mind and heart, enabling us to see and feel as the entertainer sees and feels. To change the metaphor, the purpose of entertainment is to open a window, allowing us to perceive some aspect of reality from another's point of view. In this sense, entertainment is the very opposite of amusement. Amusements put the mind in neutral; entertainments shift them into gear. A cheap murder mystery may be merely amusing, but *Crime and Punishment* is entertaining. A verse from Ogden Nash is amusing; one from John Donne is entertaining. Tin Pan Alley was amusing, while Bach is entertaining. A painting by Thomas Kinkade is a pleasant amusement, but a Rembrandt is a genuine entertainment, even when it is less pleasant. In each of these pairs, one has something to say and the other does not. One takes us out of ourselves and allows us to perceive reality from a new standpoint, while the other simply reflects to us our own appetites and prejudices. That is why amusements quickly become tepid. They fade away. Genuine entertainments endure because they continue to challenge and change us.

Another use of leisure is avocation. An avocation is a productive activity pursued for personal pleasure rather than for gain. Avocations are more than recreation and

certainly more than amusement. Unlike entertainments, which invite us to consider the world, avocations are ways of working in the world. Avocations contribute to the world's larger wellbeing, working toward its beauty, utility, and order. A skilled quilter or a woodworker will produce items that are both beautiful and useful. An amateur rose gardener increases the world's beauty. A coin or stamp collector gathers, orders, and preserves a record of one part of the human drama. Some people write novels or poems in their spare time. Others remodel houses. Much of human progress has been propelled by people who employed their leisure to pursue avocations.

We can also use our leisure by volunteering to serve others. We can give up our own time and efforts to meet specific needs that other people are experiencing. This kind of service may be as modest as baking a plate of cookies for the neighbor next door, or it may volunteer service in large civic or charitable endeavors. Many organizations such as schools, hospitals, and libraries are often staffed partly with volunteers. Obviously, churches could not fulfill their ministries if the work had to be done entirely by paid staff. Volunteer service is essential to many human endeavors. Because it takes us out of our everyday vocation, volunteer service may well act as a form of recreation and perhaps even entertainment.

How should we Christians redeem the time? The Bible never gives us a list of activities that qualify as most useful, let alone most moral. In general, however, amusements constitute the least productive and least restorative use of our leisure. Sometimes they are even destructive. By pursuing them we improve neither ourselves nor others. Hours filled with television, video games, and the popular arts simply slip through our fingers.

Recreation, entertainment (in the proper sense), avocation, and voluntary service all have a role in our lives. By using our leisure in these ways, we can make ourselves, our churches, and our world better. In the right proportions these activities can be pursued to the glory of God, and that should be the goal of our lives.

Kevin Bauder is a research professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minnesota.



# The Name of God and

Even secular culture cannot help but make moral judgments. Sometimes Christians can affirm the world's ethic, and sometimes we must challenge it.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the culture gets it right and sometimes it is wrong.

One of the ways in which our society has failed drastically is in its assessment of the rightness or wrongness of taking God's name in vain. This is clearly illustrated at the box office. Consider how many times God's name is abused in the following popular movies.<sup>2</sup>

- *Avengers: Infinity War*—about ten times
- *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*—sixteen times
- *The Incredibles 2*—twice<sup>3</sup>

We would all agree that taking God's name in vain is a sin (Exod. 20:7).<sup>4</sup> But is it a sin to watch movies in which His name is misused? How should we think through this issue, and what should be the heart behind our decisions?

This is a conscience issue, so I cannot tell you what to do, nor may I judge you if you prayerfully adopt a standard other than my own. You answer to God, not me (Rom. 14:10–13). However, we ought to educate our consciences, so to that end I want to challenge you to grapple with the passages and principles that relate to this issue.

Here are eight reasons to reconsider watching movies in which God's name is misused.

## 1. Because you love and fear God and are zealous for His glory.

Our holiness must be rooted in relationship, not in rules, lest we fall into legalism (Matt. 22:37–40; 1 Pet. 1:14–21). Therefore, we must reverence God's name primarily because we love and fear Him.

In the Bible God's name represents His character (Exod. 33:19; John 17:6). Therefore, to be zealous for His name is to be zealous for His glory. God's people know His name (Isa. 52:6) and proclaim it by praising God publicly (Deut. 32:3; Ps. 57:9–10). They pray for His name to be hallowed (Matt. 6:9) and long for the day in which every knee will bow to Jesus' name (Phil. 2:10). They lament that God's name is blasphemed "continually every day" (Isa. 52:5) and respond zealously when His name is attacked (1 Sam 17:26, 45–46).

In contrast, the wicked misuse God's name because they don't know Him, love Him, or respect Him (Exod. 5:2; 2 Tim. 2:2, 4).

The attitude that we should have toward God's name is exemplified in many hymns. The irony is that we sing songs such as "Blessed Be the Name," "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," or "Jesus, Name above All Names" and then watch programs that defile that very same name.

## 2. Because the Old Testament illustrates the serious nature of blasphemy.

For instance, in Leviticus 24:10–23 a man who blasphemes God's name while involved in a fight is taken into custody. Not wanting to be rash, the people ask God what to do. His answer? "Stone him. And the same goes for anyone else who blasphemes My name." In Israel, blasphemy was to be considered a capital offense, and the congregation had to enact this judgment.

Now, we are not Israel, nor are we under the Law (Rom. 6:14). That said, we must remember that the Law has ongoing significance (Matt. 5:17–20). Most importantly, it illustrates the character of God, including His moral demands (Lev. 19:2). Therefore, *the principles behind the Law* are applicable for all people in all places and at all times. Through the Spirit, you and I are enabled to live out God's original plan for humanity as illustrated by the Law (see Jer. 31:31–34; Rom. 10:4; and Gal. 5:22–23).

Leviticus 24:10–23 reveals that God does not take lightly the abuse of His name. As Christians, we are not necessarily surprised to learn that idolatry, murder, or even adultery was punishable by death under the law. We should think hard about the fact that blasphemy was to be treated the same way.

## 3. Because when it comes to movies, you can no longer claim ignorance: a three-minute Web search will reveal exactly what is said in that movie.

You can find specific information about objectionable elements in each movie via IMDB's Parent Guide or Focus on the Family's pluggedin.com.

## 4. Because you probably would not consider reciting that line for a play.

If it is a sin for the actor, is it not also a sin for the viewer?



# the Movies

**5. Because most of the time that God's name is misused in movies, the practice is not limited to villains nor is it condemned.**

Someone might argue, "But the Bible includes stories of people who cursed God's name." That is true. But those people are always depicted as villains: they either repent or are judged. If a movie were to communicate the same moral tone about blasphemy, that would be one thing. But rarely if ever is that the case. *The clear message being sent by many movies is that it is normal and acceptable to blaspheme God.*

**6. Because you don't have to watch that movie. There are probably better uses for your time.**

We have so many entertainment options available to us, and the pressure to watch the movies that everyone else is watching can be strong. However, we must remember that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth (Heb. 11:13) and that we are called to redeem the time because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). Our lives are very short, and there is much to be accomplished and enjoyed (Eccles. 9:7–10; John 9:4). You will not die if you never watch that movie. In fact, you will probably be better off and more useful to God.

**7. Because there are filtering services available.**

If you conclude that it is sin to watch a particular movie, then you must not do so, *whether or not there is filtering available* (Rom. 14:23). However, since filtering is available for many movies, you have even less excuse.

The two major movie filtering companies are VidAngel and ClearPlay. VidAngel costs \$9.99 per month, and ClearPlay is \$7.99 per month plus the cost of the equipment.

TV Guardian provides products that block foul language in cable television, closed-captioned DVDs and VHS cassettes, and some satellite boxes and over-the-air antennas. Prices vary depending on the product.

**8. Because we must not be conformed to this world. Just because everyone else is doing it doesn't mean you have to.**

The more time we spend in the world, the more it rubs off on us. That is why we need the Bible. If we are going to avoid being pressed into the world's mold, we must continually renew our minds with Scripture (Rom. 12:2). Are your standards based on the culture or the Bible?

In *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis confronts the human tendency to justify sin because it is "normal."

Many of us have had the experience of living in some local pocket of human society—some particular school, college, regiment or profession where the tone was bad. And inside that pocket certain actions were regarded as merely normal ("Everyone does it") and certain others as impracticably virtuous and Quixotic. But when we emerged from that bad society we made the horrible discovery that in the outer world our "normal" was the kind of thing that no decent person ever dreamed of doing, and our "Quixotic" was taken for granted as the minimum standard of decency. What had seemed to us morbid and fantastic scruples so long as we were in the "pocket" now turned out to be the only moments of sanity we there enjoyed.<sup>5</sup>

The word "quixotic" means "exceedingly idealistic; unrealistic and impractical." Most people would probably call refusing to watch movies that misuse God's name "quixotic." However, we must ask ourselves, when we get to heaven, what are the chances that the standards which seem normal today will be exposed as the kind of positions that no decent person would ever dream of defending? What are the chances that today's "morbid and fantastic scruples" will be revealed as the minimum standard of decency?

May God's name be regarded as holy.

Kristopher Schaal is a husband, father, and pastor at Life Point Baptist Church in Apple Valley, California.



<sup>1</sup> For instance, I would argue that generally speaking, we should affirm #MeToo but challenge LGBTQ.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics taken from [www.pluggedin.com](http://www.pluggedin.com).

<sup>3</sup> What is surprising in this instance is not necessarily the number of times God's name is taken in vain but that, more and more, His name is taken in vain in kids' movies.

<sup>4</sup> In Exodus 20:7 "the name" is a reference to YHWH, the personal name of God (the same goes for Lev. 24:11). However, most teachers and preachers have rightly taken the principle behind this command to mean that it is wrong to misuse other names for God as well.

<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Quebec: Samizdat University Press, 2016), [http://www.samizdat.qc.ca/cosmos/philo/PDFs/ProblemofPain\\_CSL.pdf](http://www.samizdat.qc.ca/cosmos/philo/PDFs/ProblemofPain_CSL.pdf), 36.

# Does God Care about Sports?

I must confess that I'm a huge sports fan. Specifically, I'm a huge New England sports fan. In my closet I have a Boston Red Sox t-shirt I wear on a regular basis that reads, "It is whether you win or lose." Overarching the message of the t-shirt is the predominant, but twisted, American value that winning is everything in life. That American value shows itself in the priority many people place on sports—and not just on their cheering for their favorite professional or college team. Many American families have chosen to place sports as their top priority.

Don't believe me? Just look at where we are putting our money. Jesus said that where our treasure is our hearts will be also (Matt. 6:21). Stats seem to indicate that our hearts are in sports. Whether it was going to a sporting event, purchasing athletic equipment, or buying a gym membership, the amount of money spent on sports continues to climb. Over the past year American spent a whopping \$100 billion on sports.

But that's not all—our time is also being evaporated by a growing sports climate. I remember a time growing up when there was a season for basketball, a season for





baseball, and a season for soccer or football. Today the American teenager doesn't have that luxury. High school teenagers are pressured to participate in travel teams, sweat it out at special "work days," and go to summer sports camps if they want even to sniff playing time on a varsity team. There may be rules against coaches spending too much time coaching, but we all know it still happens.

Couple this with the level of intensity now permeating our youth sports programs. Today it's not uncommon to sit next to an irate parent on the sidelines, watch a student athlete lose it at a ref, or observe a coach demanding too much from his junior varsity players who just learned to tie their own shoes. It's clear we've forgotten that high school students are playing basketball or soccer alongside learning algebra and writing research papers.

Sports are supposed to offer life lessons: handling defeat with class, working hard toward a common goal, performing under pressure. Many of us have seen this work and are beneficiaries of it. But we as a culture have sullied all that by taking sports too far. We've misplaced

our priorities, and in so doing we've missed the whole point of sports.

The whole point of sports is that they're not the point. Really, who cares who wins? My high school soccer team won back-to-back-to-back state championships in our little Christian school league. Do you know how many times I've been asked what our record was? Not one single time in my adult life. We quickly devolve into silliness when forced to imagine that a dusty banner in a basketball gym matters for eternity.

But the truth is that God *does* care who wins—just not in the way we do. To suggest He doesn't "care" is to be pressed into the opposite, yet just as extreme, corner. We care who wins because our identity is somehow tied to this sport. God cares because games are an opportunity for created beings to enjoy play, but in doing so to glorify Him. We care because we want to win for ourselves. God cares because every aspect of the human experience is an opportunity to point to Him. We care because we've replaced God with games.

My soccer coach for two years used to have our team put our hands in a circle and say this phrase together before we took the field: "All to the glory of God, not men!" It was a simple phrase, but it got the point across. God jealously promotes His own glory.

I believe that if we were to ask the apostle Paul what verse he'd quote to a sports team he was coaching, he'd probably go to Colossians 3:17, which says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Sports is one of those "whatsoever you do" things. It's important but it's not *the* most important thing.

Be very wary that sports do not become an institutional idol in your life. In Matthew 16 Jesus introduced a new era of history. In verse 18 of that passage He told His disciples that He would build His church. From that point onward the church was to take priority in the lives of His disciples. Sadly, the Devil has used sports as an avenue to replace the church as top priority. Churches with Christian schools in them are especially in danger of falling into this trap. How many times have you seen the school athletic director get first dibs on setting the church calendar?

The question we need to consider is whether we care about sports the same way God cares about them. Perhaps a simple exercise would help us better analyze our standing on this issue. Look at the last twelve months on your calendar. How many of those days were filled with sports-related activities? Sports are fun and shouldn't be considered sinful, but they're clearly not supposed to be the most important thing on our calendars. If sports-related activities are overwhelmingly taking over your calendar, I think we all can agree from Scripture that there's a problem.

Do we think God cares about sports? No. At least not in the way we do. But we can still use sports as a platform to spread His name and give Him glory so long as we don't misplace our priorities. "Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things" (1 Tim. 4:8).

Caleb Phelps (BA, MA) serves as youth pastor at Crosspointe Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a frequent speaker for junior and teen camps. You can follow his writings at [pursuingthepursuer.org](http://pursuingthepursuer.org).



## 2018

### September 27-28, 2018

New Mexico Regional Fellowship  
Grace Baptist Church  
2200 Sullivan Avenue  
Farmington, NM 87401  
505.330.5632

### October 15-16, 2018

Central Regional Fellowship  
Midland Baptist Church  
4200 N. Church Circle  
Wichita, KS 67205

### November 5-6, 2018

Southern California Regional Fellowship  
Victory Baptist Church  
PO Box 2462  
California City, CA 93504

## 2019

### January 28-29, 2019

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship  
Westside Baptist Church  
6260 West 4th Street  
Greeley, CO 80634

### February 18-20, 2019

Winter Board Meeting  
Northwest Valley Baptist Church  
4030 W Yorkshire Drive  
Glendale, AZ 85308

### April 1-3, 2019

South Regional Fellowship  
Catawba Springs Christian Church  
6801 Ten-Ten Road  
Apex, NC 27539

### April 29-30, 2019

Wyoming State Fellowship  
Grace Baptist Church  
905 Pine Avenue  
Kemmerer, WY 83101

### June 10-12, 2019

99th Annual Fellowship  
Red Rocks Baptist Church  
14711 West Morrison Road  
Morrison, CO 80465

### July 29-31, 2019

Alaska Regional Fellowship  
Maranatha Baptist Church  
7747 East 6th Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99404  
907.338.2123

## 2020

### July 27-29, 2020

Alaska Regional Fellowship  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
7540 E. Cottrell-Campus Road  
Palmer, AK 99645  
907.745.0610

### March 23-25, 2020

South Regional Fellowship  
Morningside Baptist Church  
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# SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

## First Partaker

### Producing Pastors Who Prize Godly Piety

For some twenty-five years, what is becoming a small but significant shelfful of books has been multiplying on various aspects of the early history of Princeton Seminary. They may have some vital contribution to make to those of us concerned to preserve conservative, scriptural ministry for the next generation. Iain Murray explains insightfully in his forward to one of these remarkable works,

A mood of doubt and uncertainty has seized many churches with respect to all things old or traditional. Not a few would tend to regard it as axiomatic that the history of a seminary for the years 1812–1868 can have little relevance to needs which face us at the end of the twentieth century. A serious reading of these pages will lead to a different conclusion. The trouble with too much contemporary Christianity is not that it has hung on too long to the lessons of the past and has found them to fail. It is rather that those lessons are so very little known.

Dredging up those little-known lessons is the objective of two writers especially. The first is David Calhoun, an aged, retired Church History professor. The other is James M. Garretson, a younger but experienced pastor and seminary teacher. Both are Presbyterian, but that seems to make little difference when it comes to the ministry philosophy their published works are resurrecting.

In the interest of getting quickly to the one “lesson” from Princeton’s past that I’d like to highlight, I’ll mention only the more important of these

two writers’ titles. General acquaintance with Princeton Seminary is provided by David Calhoun’s two-volume history, *Faith and Learning: 1812–1868* (Banner of Truth, 1994), and *The Majestic Testimony: 1869–1929* (Banner of Truth, 1996).

These recount the deeply moving story of the decades during which Princeton Seminary became an orthodox, spiritual nursery for thousands of ministers and missionaries, including many Baptists. Princeton’s professors during this period believed that *preaching Christ is the best, hardest, sweetest work, on this side [of] beholding him*.

The founding professor was Archibald Alexander, a fervent, forty-year-old preacher. His providential preparation for training young ministers commenced with three years as an itinerant horseback evangelist along Virginia’s southern frontier bordering North Carolina, his saddlebags stuffed with Bibles and tracts. Following those years rich with preaching and personal work, he settled into the routine of pastoring a circuit of small churches. Later he undertook the presidency of a small college (Hampden-Sidney) and after that a six-year pastorate in Philadelphia, the largest city in the nation at the time.

In 1812 Alexander accepted the call to plant the seminary. He began with just three students, whom he lodged, taught, and disciplined in his own home and around his own table. It’s this thrilling story that James Garretson tells in his *Princeton and Preaching: Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry* (Banner of Truth, 2005). A natural sequel is Garretson’s *Thoughts on Preaching and Pastoral Ministry: Lessons from the Life and Writings of James W. Alexander* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), the account of the ministry of one of Alexander’s brilliant sons.

Joining Alexander at Princeton one year later was a renowned New York City pastor named Samuel Miller. The two labored together prodigiously for nearly four decades until the latter’s death in 1850. Garretson tells the inspiring story of Miller in *An Able and Faithful*

*“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits”*  
(2 Tim. 2:6)

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Ministry: *Samuel Miller and the Pastoral Office* (Banner of Truth, 2014). In addition, Garretson has edited two volumes of the substantive addresses which these two men and their successors at Princeton gave to the seminarians: *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry* (Banner of Truth, 2012).

It would be impossible for me to explain or even describe the refreshing effect that these titles have had upon my own spirit and thinking. I feel that certain things which I've always believed (but which perhaps, to my shame, I haven't emphasized sufficiently) have come into sharp focus. My intent in this article is to highlight just one; it's certainly the most critical. It is what the early Princeton professors called *vital piety*.

## Vital Piety in Seminary Students

The root of a seminary that would prize *vital piety* above all other ministerial attainments grew out of the initial work of an exploratory committee. It proposed that the new institution's character be, *under the blessing of God, a nursery of vital piety, as well as of sound theological learning*. The committee warned that *filling the church with a learned and able ministry, without a corresponding portion of real piety, would be a curse to the world, and an offence to God and his people*.

Accordingly, the final *Plan of the Theological Seminary* included an article entitled "Of Devotion and Improvement of Practical Piety." Its first sentence is so long that I've taken the liberty to put certain phrases in bold font so that we don't run past them.

It ought to be considered as **an object of primary importance by every student** in the seminary to be careful and vigilant not to lose that inward sense of the power of godliness which he may have attained; but, on the contrary, **to grow continually in a spirit of enlightened devotion and fervent piety**; deeply impressed with the recollection that **without this, all his other acquisitions will be comparatively of little worth**, either to himself, or to the church of which he is to be a minister.

To grasp the lofty significance of the committee's ideals, you might have to read parts of it again: *every student in the seminary to be careful and vigilant not to lose that inward sense of the power of godliness . . . to grow continually in a spirit of enlightened devotion and fervent piety . . . without this, all his other acquisitions will be comparatively of little worth*.

These ideals for the students weren't left amorphously abstract. They were followed by seven paragraphs of concrete specifics. These included the expectation that a portion of every morning and evening were to be spent in *devout meditation, and self-recollection and examination; in reading the holy Scriptures, solely with a view to a personal and practical application of the passage read, to his own heart, character, and circumstances; and in humble, fervent prayer and praise to God in secret*. The entirety of every Lord's Day was to be devoted to *devotional exercises. . . Intellectual pursuits, not immediately*

*connected with devotion, or the religion of the heart, are on that day to be forborne*. And once a month a day was to be set apart by each student for *special prayer and self-examination in secret, and also that he should, on suitable occasions, attend to the duty of fasting*.

Significant to this present article is the fact that Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller were two of the seven who authored the plan and worded its articles' high ideals.

What I'd like now to do is to "dig up" some of the earliest "soil" in which this emphasis on vital piety evidently was rooted. It is Miller's youthful soil, especially, that I want to highlight, through scanning a short series of letters. They were written by his parents over the course of the one year that their son studied at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Though brief, what they reveal is the nature of the home, the chemistry of the "ground," in which he was raised. It is the kind of soil that historically, by God's grace, has proven especially suited to raising up ministers who prize personal holiness above all things.

## Parental Letters

Samuel's father, John, pastored a small church in Dover, Delaware, for nearly fifty years. He was studious, principled, and deeply devoted to the Lord. His wife, Margaret, was his equal. Samuel testified, *She was one of the most pious women that I ever knew*.

Consistent with this conspicuous parental godliness were two other spiritual factors in Samuel's home that surface in the letters: minimization of worldly attainment and meager material circumstances. Here's why these catch my attention.

This summer our church held a conference for pastors and missionaries. Most of the nearly one hundred men who attended are laboring in small works. Many are bivocational. They live in small, older homes, drive high-mileage cars, and seldom have money or time to spend on entertainment, sports, travel, or even their necessary libraries. I hope that they and others who read these letters may be encouraged to see that a combination of prizing piety, encouraging separateness, and contentedness with modest means can be God's happy nursery for producing young people, especially young ministers, who will grow up to promote personal holiness above all things.

The letters are written not to Samuel but to his sister, Betsey, and to her husband, Col. Samuel McLane, in whose home Samuel lodged. The first, dated July 17, 1788, opens a window into the family's pinched material circumstances as well as into John's chief ambition for Samuel.

My dear Son,

Pressed on all hands by my friends, (not considering my having no income adequate to the support of my family . . . and the very probable want and distress to which they may be reduced soon after my



removal), I have at length consented to Sammy's going to Philadelphia, to spend some short time at the University. Which I should not have done, had I not a very great dependence on your and Betsey's attention to him, and giving him such advices and counsels, as, with the blessing of heaven, may effectually tend to form him, should he be spared, to important usefulness in the world.

You well know what my desire is respecting him; viz., that he may be a well-informed, sincere, prudent and humble follower of Christ. Unless his education is sanctified, by divine grace, for this purpose, I think he had better be without it.

That last sentence seems to be echoed and even heightened twenty years later when the Princeton committee (of which his son was now an influential member) warned, *A learned and able ministry, without a corresponding portion of real piety, would be a curse to the world, and an offence to God and his people.*

The letter continues, voicing John's strong preference that Samuel follow him in the ministry, *notwithstanding the temporal discouragements*, rather than pursue medicine or law, neither of which does he see as helpful to living a godly life.

Were he, from right principles, disposed and prepared for the gospel ministry, it would be inexpressibly pleasing to me, and I doubt not to you, notwithstanding the temporal discouragements, which, at present, may lie in the way of it.

The other professions of Physic and Law, as they are now conducted by the generality, appear to me unfriendly to a life of real piety, especially the last. . . . On the whole, I must warmly solicit you, to direct him into such a path of prudence, and urge him to such a veneration for a pious and virtuous life, as may give us all, by the will of God, much comfort concerning him. . . .

May the best of heaven's blessings rest and abide with you forever!

Two days later Samuel's mother sent a similar letter to her son-in-law, urging his doing whatever necessary to ensure Samuel's walking circumspectly.

My very dear Son,

By this time I hope your brother Sammy has arrived safe in Philadelphia, and though, I was so much hurried getting him ready to set off that I did not send you a line, I cannot omit it now. Oh, my dear Sir, it is with gratitude I recollect your kind invitation to him, which no length of time will efface from my mind. And I rely very much on your care of him. Please to exercise the most unlimited control of his conduct, and I think he will love you the better for it. Sammy is at a very trying time of life. I hope, my dear Child, you will have a watchful eye over him at all times. Oh, may that eye which never slumbereth nor sleepeth direct him in all his way—is the prayer of your afflicted mother; and I ask for him and

myself also an interest in your prayers.

A month later John mailed a second letter. It is noteworthy for the one thing it emphasizes.

My dear Son,

I am just now crawling out again, after a spell of the bilious fever. With great difficulty I went last Sabbath and preached a sermon at Dover, and seem still to be recovering.

I hope Sammy is doing well, and have no fear at present of his industry and application to business; but may he and all of us remember that one thing is needful. Eternity, my dear Son, is infinitely important.

---

## ***I feel that certain things which I've always believed . . . have come into sharp focus.***

In September, Rev. Miller wrote a third time. He had heard that Samuel was planning a brief visit to Princeton, perhaps to visit the College of New Jersey. Its president was John Witherspoon, twelve years earlier one of the courageous signers of the Declaration of Independence. Witherspoon was widely known for his splendid lectures on rhetoric and philosophy. Perhaps Samuel wished to hear him.

The correspondence is valuable not only for what it communicates about John's spiritual concerns but also for its further details about the hardships his family was enduring in order for him to continue pastoring.

I am now, through divine goodness, in the way of recovery, have preached twice, but, by fevers continuing, am still in a feeble state. Your mamma likewise has intermitting fevers; but keeps chiefly about house; and both of us by such growing infirmities as commonly attend our advanced period of life, are admonished of the approaching day, when we shall leave you all in a world of sin and sorrows, from the snares of which nothing less than God's special grace in Christ Jesus can secure you. May we be found waiting for the coming of our Lord, living by faith and attempered for the heavenly blessedness!

I am sorry to hear of Sammy's purpose of going to Princeton, as I am sure he has neither money nor time to spend on any such jaunt. Did he know that almost every resource for the support of the family has lately failed; that the chief of our people pay me nothing; that perquisites are reduced to a trifle, and that I have not received twenty shillings since he left us, I think he would be more prudent. He is disposed, I fully believe, to be diligent; but considering my present straitened situation, he must also make a point of being very frugal; otherwise he will be under the necessity of returning home, without answering his chief purpose.

My earnest wish is, that he may be serious, and with deep solicitude pursue an early and experimental acquaintance with vital religion, without which every other accomplishment will avail him nothing.

It's impossible not to see in that last sentence a "seed" come to full growth twenty years later when the seminary committee said of any student's growth in piety, *without this, all his other acquisitions will be comparatively of little worth.*

The day after Christmas John wrote his son-in-law again. Quaint domestic details transport us back into the rugged simplicity of the times.

My dear Son,

Mr. Loockerman came down late on Sabbath evening (a very improper time to travel), extremely pinched with the cold. He since has been sick with an inflammatory fever; but being bled largely, he is better, and sitting up again. By him we received your letters, with a gown for your mamma, and a pair of breeches for myself, for which I am greatly obliged to you, though they happen to be much too big for me, as I am sure they must be for yourself. Your mamma is as well as usual, busy about her family affairs, but, I believe, very intent on the one thing needful.

We live, on the whole, comfortably, but chiefly on the produce of our little farm. Your mammy has a good turkey in keeping for you, as we expect a visit from you this season, and wish it may be convenient for you to gratify us with your company.

Poor Sam is indeed poor, beggarly poor, as he himself suggests; but let him know, if he loves and fears God, he won't want anything that will be best for him. I here enclose a guinea, received last week, for him. I earnestly wish, my dear daughter, with yourself, much of God's gracious, sanctifying and comforting presence.

Both parents wrote in March. Samuel evidently wished to attend a school which would teach him how to sing properly. His sister was reserved. Again, Samuel's parents' response reflected their values. Mrs. Miller wrote,

My very dear Betsey,

Your brother informs me that you, for some reasons, advise him to decline going to the singing school. I have no doubt but your reasons are good; therefore I desire you and Mr. McLane to give him your advice as you would a child of your own; and though I have a great desire he should go, yet if it would interfere with his other learning I must give it up. Oh, my dear Betsey, of what infinite importance it is that we be prepared for eternity.

Rev. Miller wrote similarly to his son-in-law of some unidentified similar earthly disappointment.

I hope such trials will be blessed by heaven, to convince you of the transitory nature of all worldly enjoyment, and lead you to place your happiness in the possession of such objects as no earthly occurrence can deprive you of. Oh may we be more and more sensible, that unless God in Christ is our friend and portion, we can neither truly enjoy the comforts of this life, nor obtain the blessedness of that to come!


One of the final letters before commencement that year came from John to both daughter and son-in-law. Samuel had been suffering from a dangerous cough since at least March.

As to cloth for a coat and breeches for myself, a black, or deep blue, or clergyman's grey, would very well suit me. . . . But you will, I hope, be much more solicitous for your own and our spiritual welfare, than for any of our temporal concerns. Eternity, with all its most solemn and important scenes, will very soon be opened to our view: we are living on the borders of it, and need to be continually realizing it, that we may live above the present world, and have our hearts chiefly placed on God and heaven.

Under these lively impressions, we wish you frequently to take opportunities of conversing with your brother Sammy, and giving him such advice and counsels, as may tend to a proper improvement of the affliction God has been pleased to visit him with, and the mercy that has been shown him, in his being so far restored to health. You will endeavor to direct his views, should his life be spared, to such studies and pursuits, as will, by the divine blessing, render him most useful in the world, and the greatest comfort to his connexions. You will endeavor to guard him against the dangerous snare of vain and trifling company; against imbibing the spirit, and following the maxims and habits of a degenerate world; against all those things, which, in your devourest hours, you will judge are inconsistent with a spiritual and holy life.

Once again, a stem may be traced all the way forward to the stated expectations for students in the fledgling seminary two decades later.

If any student shall exhibit, in his general deportment, a levity or indifference in regard to practical religion, though it do not amount to any overt act of irreligion or immorality, it shall be the duty of the professor who may observe it, to admonish him tenderly and faithfully in private, and endeavor to engage him to a more holy temper, and a more exemplary deportment.

So if your circumstances are humble but your home is godly, be encouraged! You may be raising a son or a daughter who, in the providence of God, will in his or her turn champion *vital piety* for hundreds or even thousands who will serve the Lord vigorously for decades to come. Oh, for more such simple, pious homes! 



# Bring . . . the Books

*Goforth of China*

If a Hebrews 11-inspired list was compiled for church history saints, surely Jonathan Goforth would be named—not for being great himself but, instead, for being an ordinary man who learned to trust in a great God. Goforth was a man of character thanks to his upbringing, and after coming to know Christ, he developed the character or habit of faith. Truly, he was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” Rosalind, his wife, wrote a four-part record of her husband’s life, providing an honest picture of both the triumphs and trials of their missionary life.

Part one of *Goforth of China* covers his 1859 birth to parents of English and Irish descent, growing up on a Canadian farm, and trusting Christ, largely due to the earnest preaching and appeal of a Presbyterian minister. The narrative highlights the impact of M’Cheyne’s memoirs’ moving him to surrender selfish ambitions in favor of ministry, the beginnings of a habit of rising early for unbroken hours with the Word, and a shifting of focus from serving in Canada to reaching unevangelized millions after hearing a missionary challenge. It closes with his time at Knox College, where peers who initially mocked the country bumpkin eventually came to support and financially back his plans for China.

Part two covers his first twelve years in China. “Brother, if you would enter that province [North Honan], you must *go forward on your knees*,” is what Hudson Taylor offered upon learning of Goforth’s intended field, and this Goforth did. Since the language did not come easy for him, the Chinese did not prefer for him to preach, and on one occasion, he voiced deep concerns to his wife. Yet two hours later he returned to her rejoicing at having suddenly become quite fluent, even in style! Rosalind recounts their joy in discovering that some Canadian friends were burdened to pray for them at that very time and had sensed that God heard their cry.

After much prayer, the Lord opened the door for their specific field (Changte), and ministering kept them incredibly busy. God established and sustained the couple, and the work went forward despite losses that included the deaths of several of their children. When the Boxer Rebellion ushered in a period of confusion and violence, the Goforths did not come through unscathed. Forced to flee Honan in 1900, they would return a year later.

The years 1901 to 1925 are covered in part three. Although considered a successful missionary by many, Goforth longed for the “greater works” of John 14:12. Blessed by accounts of the Welsh Revival and challenged to understand and obey God’s “spiritual laws,” Goforth read books on the Holy Spirit and launched into an intensive study. He soon exclaimed, “I feel like one who has tapped a mine of wealth! It is so wonderful! Oh, if I could only get others to see it!”

In 1906, when Goforth preached on Christ bearing

our sins to a heathen audience that filled a street chapel, the Spirit moved, conviction registered on many faces, and nearly everyone decided for Christ. One awestruck evangelist rightly concluded, “He for whom we have prayed so long was here in very deed tonight.” Revival blessing continued.

In God’s providence Goforth had the opportunity to travel and witness the mighty Korean Revival of 1907. Then, returning to Honan via Manchuria, he spoke at several mission stations, telling the Korean story. This opened the door for itinerate work as invitations came from Manchuria asking him to speak to wider audiences. The watchword of his message sounded clearly, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.” God repeatedly poured out His Spirit in mighty revival during this Manchurian tour. Saints were brought by the Spirit to confess sins, and this opened the way for an awakening among the lost.

This led to more open doors and a special series of meetings in his own field of Changte. A Scottish Presbyterian minister who described what he witnessed there as “Wonderful!,” added, “The church in Changte has been baptized by the Holy Spirit and cleansed.” Goforth would continue to split his time between itinerate evangelism and the work at Changte. As he preached the abundant life to saints and eternal life to the lost, the harvest was truly plentiful.

Part four covers the final segment of their ministry. When the Goforths sought a new field, God opened an opportunity in a needy section of Manchuria and blessed the work from the outset. Aggressive evangelism marked the ministry as Goforth believed in giving the gospel a chance. Though there were trials of sickness and finances, God continued to use the Goforths even as Jonathan’s sight began to fail with age.

Ministering in China and North America in his final years, the blind face of Jonathan Goforth was marked with a noticeable radiance as he continued faithfully onward and upward. After a glorious ministry at a conference in North Carolina, Goforth passed into glory during his sleep in October of 1936.

Fifteen years ago, when copies of *Goforth of China* were selling for \$80 on the Internet, an assistant pastor let me into a closet-sized church bookstore. There, on the shelf, were two new copies of the paperback edition, each with the price tag of \$3.95! Briefly contemplating taking both off his hands, I opted instead to tell my guide the going price for this title. As his eyes widened,

“... when  
thou comest,  
bring with thee  
... the books”  
(2 Tim. 4:13)

John Van Gelderen is an evangelist and president of Revival Focus Ministries, maintains a blog at [revivalfocus.org](http://revivalfocus.org), and hosts the annual Christ Life Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

# Straight Cuts

## Does 1 Corinthians 14:2 Support the Use of a Personal Prayer Language?

Many Christians both inside and outside the charismatic movement believe that the private use of a personal prayer language is—or might be—a legitimate continuing function of the gift of tongues. Since it is used only in private rather than in a public service, it would seem to violate none of the biblical restrictions (e.g., the need for an interpreter). More significantly, the Bible might even seem to commend such a practice: “For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries” (1 Cor. 14:2). This issue needs a closer examination.

The first problem with a personal prayer language is that the Bible clearly declares that the Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, not for the benefit of the gifted individual. According to 1 Corinthians 12:7, all gifts are “to profit withal” (lit. “for the common good”). Paul confirms the significance of this point by devoting chapter 13 to the theme of love, stating that the exercise of spiritual gifts apart from love for others is entirely worthless no matter what language one speaks (13:1–3). Chapter 14 also repeatedly highlights the necessity of using one’s gift to edify the church (e.g., 3–5, 12, 17, 19, 26).

The prayer-language interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:2, then, is a misunderstanding of Paul’s actual meaning. In context—immediately following the focus on love in chapter 13—this verse is not a commendation at all but a blunt rebuke of a use of tongues that benefits only oneself. God certainly doesn’t need edification, and because no one else understands the speaker, he is inappropriately using a gift provided by the Spirit in a way that preempts the Spirit’s expressed purpose. In contrast, verse 3 commends prophecy speaking biblical truth in a language the listeners can understand as a message that benefits *others* with “edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Verse 4 rebukes a private use of tongues once again, this time by explicitly pointing to the experience of self-edification. Paul assumes that the reader has paid attention to his previous calls to edify the church and so expects us to understand that such self-gratification is selfish, illegitimate, and sinful. (See Larry Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2001, 166ff.) On the other hand, as Paul says, prophecy “edifieth the church.”

On an important side note, verse 4 reveals another important truth about the gift of tongues. According to verses 16–17, edification is possible only when one understands the message. If in verse 4 the speaker alone is edified (even though that is an illegitimate use of his gift), then he must understand the language

he is speaking. This conclusion fits well with the situation on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. It is extremely awkward and highly unlikely that after the believers used the various tongues that Luke lists to praise God for His mighty works (Acts 2:11), they then wondered what they had said—only to have unsaved Jewish immigrants inform them. On the contrary, one would expect that when the Lord gave the gift of tongues it included both the ability to speak *and* the ability to understand. Of course, that seems to conflict with 1 Corinthians 14:13, where Paul exhorts the one who speaks in a tongue to “pray that he may interpret.” In the following verses, however, Paul is expanding the possible categories for the use of tongues from just *speaking* (in the previous verses) to include *praying* and *singing* as well (14–15). In verse 13, then, he is not suggesting that the speaker ask the Lord for the ability to interpret—but that he should offer his prayer with the *intention* to interpret it. (The Greek word *hina* does not introduce the *content* of the prayer but the *purpose* to interpret the prayer when he is finished.) What, then, did Paul mean when he went on to explain in verse 14, “For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful”? He is not suggesting that his own understanding of the meaning of his prayer would be lacking but that it would not benefit anyone else unfruitful in accomplishing the purpose of every spiritual gift. Verse 16 confirms that this is exactly what Paul means: “Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?”

If the one with the gift of tongues understands the language he is speaking, what then was the role of the individual with the gift of interpretation of tongues? Answer: not to inform the speaker but to confirm for others that the speaker’s message (and the interpretation) was valid. How was the gift of *interpretation* distinct from the gift of *tongues*? Answer: it included the ability to understand a language but *not* the ability to speak it—much like students of ancient Greek today learn to *read* the New Testament but cannot carry on a conversation in Greek—whereas the gift of tongues included both. Finally, if Paul didn’t use a personal prayer language and did not speak in tongues at public church services, when could he have spoken “with tongues more than” the Corinthians (vv. 18–19)? Answer: after proclaiming the gospel in synagogues where the majority rejected his message (vv. 21–22; cf. Acts 13:44–52).

The biblical evidence, then, rejects the gift of tongues as a personal prayer language. ☞

“Rightly  
dividing  
the Word  
of Truth”  
(2 Tim. 2:15)

Dr. Gary Reimers is pastor of Cornerstone Bible Church in Greenville, South Carolina, and adjunct professor of Theology and Expository Preaching at BJU Seminary.



Sooner or later the “windows” into the souls of all men come to have a common sign above them. The sign inevitably reads, “Weak, Facing Adversity.” Joseph Parker said, “If you preach to broken hearts, you will never lack for an audience.” The fall of our parents, Adam and Eve, into sin assures this. Weakness and adversity are the inheritance which they so thoughtfully left us!

The task of the preacher is to bring redeeming purpose to tear-stained eyes. John Henry Jowett reminded us that when Jesus publicly announced His calling by quoting Isaiah 61:1, He declared that His mission was to “bind up the brokenhearted” or, to quote Jowett, “to give open passage to all who are lying with broken wing or broken limb” (*The Yale Lectures on Preaching: The Preacher: His Life and Work*, April 1912).

Both the Bible and human history are replete with evidence that proves that strength really *can* come out of weakness and creativity really *can* be born out of adversity. We may be glad that this is so, for the inspired apostle Paul tells us that weakness and adversity are “common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13).

### The “Strength Out of Weakness” Axiom

Paul codified this maxim when he quoted our Lord as saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul immediately deduced, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Why would God bring Paul through the agony it took to learn this lesson? God permits weaknesses and adversity because God knows the stark reality. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Unguarded strength is a double weakness.” D. L. Moody said, “We have too much strength. We are not weak enough.” Hebrews 11:34 speaks of saints of old who “out of weakness were made strong.”

In his book *The Divine Conquest* A. W. Tozer wrote, “Deliverance can only come to us by the defeat of our old life. . . . God rescues us by shattering our strength and wiping out our resistance. So He conquers us and by that benign conquest saves us for Himself.”

C. I. Scofield said, “Man is a being who fancies that he has some strength. And so indeed he has in the sphere of the natural, but it is a strength that utterly breaks down in the sphere of the Christian life. The problem is to rid ourselves of self-strength that God may clothe us with His own strength. How does God effect this? . . . Somehow when we are waiting upon Him, our strength, which after all is perfect weakness, is laid aside, and divine hands clothe us with the strength of God. There is a change in the source of our strength.”

Paul Van Gorder wrote, “The apostle’s thorn in the flesh became the divinely appointed wedge to open his life to the adequacy of God’s grace. Paul was to

experience something far greater than freedom from infirmity. He was to experience *grace!*”

Missionary James Hudson Taylor once wrote, “All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them.”

Evangelist George Whitefield made thirteen voyages across the Atlantic between 1738 and 1769.

During each of these crossings he was weak and ill.

And recall the poor health of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, and David Brainerd. Recall the physical impediments of Fanny Crosby and Frances Ridley Havergal. The blind poet John Milton wrote,

Is it true, O Christ in heaven, that the highest  
suffer the most?

That the mark of rank in nature is capacity for  
pain?

One wise and affliction-taught writer said, “Pain is this grave but kindly teacher of immortal secrets, this conferrer of liberty.”

In a May 10, 1996, editorial in the *Hammond, Indiana Times*, George Will wrote,

The work of the last 13 years of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s life cannot properly be contemplated without reference to the affliction that left him a paraplegic for the last 24 years of his life. He probably would not have become president without passing through the furnace of polio. . . . The disease catalyzed the transformation of the debonair young swell, skating along on charm and connections, into a brilliant and broadly empathetic politician. . . . The temperament FDR exhibited in the 1930s and 1940s was forged in the 1920s. The iron entered into his soul when he performed with heroic ebullience the excruciating exercises necessary to make his legs ready for steel braces.

Geoffrey Ward says, “If you want to learn the secret of a man’s success, you must look at what made him *before* the trumpet blast turned the attention of the world upon him. It was pain that made FDR.”

Tozer said, “It is doubtful whether God can greatly use a man until He has deeply wounded him.”

Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, “Had it not been for the broken wing, some might have lost themselves in the clouds.”

Former Chaplain of the US Senate Richard Halverson wrote, “In one respect at least, a man is like a horse. . . . A wild horse out on the mesa may be thrilling

*“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”*

*Charles Spurgeon*

to watch . . . but he never carries a rider or pulls a load. All his energy, strength, speed, and beauty are wasted . . . until he's broken. A man is that way, too. He needs to be broken for harness! He may hold great promise: purebred pedigree, intelligence, strength, drive . . . but until he's broken, all these qualities are dissipated."

God insists on starting His exploits by weakening the one who will become His leader. Think of Moses and Jacob and Joseph and Isaiah and Daniel and Peter. E. H. Chapin said, "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars."

## The "Creativity Out of Adversity" Axiom

In Isaiah 48:10 God tells rebellious Israel, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." All of us can quickly think of many places from where we would rather be "chosen"! However, we need to resist the self-defense mechanism which avoids the fire.

"Tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3), and "patience" desires to "have her perfect work" (James 1:4). In the Greek the word translated "work" is *ργον* (*ergon*), which can have the dual connotation of "the thing wrought, something made or created generally by men" or "of works implying power, e.g., of God." The works of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, and hay in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 are the *creations* of men's minds and hands.

Plato said, "All learning has an emotional base."

Jesus did not liken the kingdom of God to a diamond but to a pearl. Of all precious gems, the pearl has the humblest origin. It begins with a wound, and is *created* out of God's resources for healing the wound.

Robert Bly said, "Where a man's wound is, that is where his genius will be. That is exactly where he will give his major gift to the community."

David was sensitized by the pain of the rejection of his brothers and by being the object of Saul's rages. Joseph also experienced the pain of jealousy at the hand of his brothers. He was cast away and sold while he was very young. Moses was removed from his parents when he was even younger than Joseph.

Deprivation may feed the springs of creativity. And this is what George Matheson says in his classic hymn, "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go." In 1882 adversity penned a masterpiece through this preacher in Scotland. Discouraged by the futility of (the "higher criticism-type") scholarship, by the instability of his own discipleship, and by the loneliness of his blindness, Matheson went through his personal Gethsemane. It was the evening of his sister's wedding, as his personal loneliness loomed larger than ever, that he wrote his immortal tribute to the conquering power of Divine Love:

O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee. . . .  
I trace the rainbow through the rain. . . .  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,

And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.

These lyrics clearly glow with a double creativity. Their *author's creativity* soars as he writes about *God's creative purposes* in and for us!

Adversity sensitizes us to details. A deliberate awareness of details is essential in the creative process. The Psalmist concluded, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

Dana Greene wrote, "Borderland experiences (periods of doubt, difficulty) may produce despair and blackness but will probably also offer the opportunity for enormous creativity."

M. R. DeHaan wrote, "Steel is iron plus fire. . . . Linen is flax plus the comb that separates, the flail that pounds and the shuttle that weaves."

Booker T. Washington created the Tuskegee Institute, an acclaimed school for African Americans, out of a stable on an abandoned farm near Tuskegee, Alabama. He wrote, "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."


Russian writer and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, "A hard life sharpens the vision."

Life handed George Washington Carver what some considered to be the skin pigmentation of disadvantage—and a handful of peanuts. Carver turned that skin color and those peanuts into ingenuity that is admired the world over. From peanuts alone he derived more than three hundred products, and he synthesized over one hundred products from the sweet potato. That is creativity! Carver's creativity was birthed out of adversity.

Adversity forces us to let our imaginations flow outside the box of conventionality. Alexander Nisbet said, "Christ often tries most the ones he minds to use most." Thomas Watson wrote, "The vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction. . . . Afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial, to the saints."

Of George Frederick Handel, composer of the *Messiah*, Deidra Duncan says, "Handel found himself a musician with neither money nor audience. . . . He had reached the lowest point in his life. . . . But Handel sang ever the sweeter in suffering. . . . In the lowest depths of despair he wrote the greatest music ever written about the Savior of all mankind" ("The Miracle of *The Messiah*," *The Fundamentalist Journal*, December 1985).

Moreover, the flip side of this axiom is equally true: living adversity-free is a sure recipe for self-inflicted destruction, "riotous living" and waste. King George thought he would do a favor for Sir Walter Scott, the prolific but impoverished literary genius, by giving him a regular support commission for the rest of his life. The irony is that the unpressured, unstressed Scott never produced a single work of outstanding merit from that point on.

No. God's methods are not the way of imagined strength and ease. God's methods are the way of weakness and adversity. From these He gets glory to Himself. 

David M. Atkinson is pastor emeritus of Dyer Baptist Church (Dyer, Indiana) and an itinerant preacher.





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It's part of the official rock video world view, it's part of the official advertising world view, that your parents are creeps, teachers are nerds and idiots, authority figures are laughable; nobody can really understand kids except the corporate sponsor. —Mark Crispin-Miller

Marketing is warfare. . . . [There is] an all-out war against America's Judeo-Christian culture. —David Limbaugh

Major corporations—Viacom, Disney, AOL/Time Warner, and others—study America's children like laboratory rats in order to sell them billions of dollars in merchandise by tempting, degrading, and corrupting them. —Douglas Rushkoff on PBS's *The Merchants of Cool*, 2001

Everything on MTV is a commercial. That's all that MTV is. —Robert McChesney

Bottom line: if the marketer can elicit in you a feeling—the feeling that attaches you to his product—he has won. Game over. —David Kupelian

Moral perversions are the natural outcome of a false object of worship. —Dean Kurtz

It is rather difficult to find a non-sexual or otherwise wholesome connotation for the flexions of rock-related aphrodisiac dancing and stage acrobatics. —John Makujina

Traditional evangelical services emphasize the preaching of God's Word. Contemporary services emphasize the music. . . . Success is determined for a traditional service when people say the Word of God convicted them. Contemporary services are considered successful when people say they “really worshiped God today” (subjective experience rather than objective truth is the basis of determining success). —Rick Flanders and Dan Lucarini

Our society has reached a point at which none of us would be surprised if the average individual is more likely to know the name of Michael Jackson's defense attorney than that of President Bush's Defense Secretary. —Lou Dobbs, 2004

MTV is the single most powerful force in popular music, and also the most ruinous. —Greg Kot, rock critic of the *Chicago Tribune*

Reality TV is blatantly evil. —Dave Marsh, editor, *Rock and Rap Confidential*

America, determined to amuse itself into inanition, is becoming increasingly desensitized. So entertainment seeking a mass audience is ratcheting up the violence, sexuality and degradation, becoming increasingly coarse and trying to be—its largest challenge—shocking in an unshockable society. —George Will, 2001

I've been getting some flack about ordering the production of the B-1. How did I know it was an airplane? I thought it was a vitamin for the troops. —Ronald Reagan

There are two ditches. One is to imagine that contemporary culture in all its elements must necessarily be evil. The other is to accept the post-modern existentialism that insists all questions of culture, including worship or music choices, are simply matters to be determined by the “group.” . . . This ditch is populated by people who imagine that “music is purely cultural.” Music is not purely cultural. —Dean Kurtz

If there had been any formidable body of cannibals in the country, [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] would have promised to provide them with free missionaries fattened at the taxpayer's expense. —H. L. Mencken

Eminem: this deeply troubled rapper has sold millions of CDs, acted out the murder of his wife, and threatened to assault just about everyone else. Among his enthusiastic fans: Christian teens. —Jeff Hooten, *Citizen* magazine

Many come [to Russia from America] with Bible in hand and rock music. We are embarrassed by this image of Christianity. We do not know what words to use in urging that this be stopped. We abhor all “Christian” rock music coming to our country. Rock music has nothing in common with ministry or service to God. —Peter Peters, Vasilij Ryzhuk, Unregistered Union of Churches, Moscow, Russia, April 15, 1992

Societies that endure always censor according to their goals. —Richard Peck, Ronald A. Horton in *Rock: Making Musical Choices*

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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David C. Innes

## Dogmatic Confusion

Arguments, debates, and divisions are not unique to fundamentalism. But fundamentalism has far too many of them. The *strength* of fundamentalists is the strength of their convictions. The corresponding *weakness* of fundamentalists is that they don't know what they really should be fighting about. Failure to distinguish the difference between fundamental truth and nonessential beliefs is a source of many unnecessary and unbiblical conflicts and divisions. The New Testament writers were keenly aware of this problem and addressed it in numerous texts of Scripture. Let's take a look at a number of the causes of conflict and division . . . which really should not exist within the body of Christ.

### ***Legitimate doctrinal disputes between key men in the churches—rooted in baggage from the previous dispensation***

In Acts 15 there was a very great dissension and disputing among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. At issue was the requirement of circumcision for salvation. Central to this debate was the carryover of the practice of circumcision from the Old Testament. This debate had the potential of great strife and division within the church and was resolved by the recognition of a New Covenant in a new dispensation of salvation based on the finished work of the cross.

### ***Persistent adherence to incorrect doctrine***

A very serious issue in Galatians 1 centered on a changing of the gospel message to include the requirement of circumcision. There were those who insisted on perverting the gospel and its message. Paul accused them in chapter 5 of rebellion and revolt. Those who insist on promoting teaching contrary to fundamental truths are themselves guilty of heresy, causing great trouble in the body of Christ. The remedy commanded in this instance was a consigning of these teachers of a false gospel to the very judgments of God.

### ***Intellectual and philosophical aberrations based on false intellectual and cultural presuppositions***

The apostle Paul issues a very clear warning in Colossians 2:4–10. Many in our day are being absorbed into the culture surrounding them. In the process they have become enamored with the ideas and ideals of a pagan world. The Word of God and our Savior, our Lord

Jesus Christ, are totally sufficient for our belief and practice and are the ultimate authority for all we believe and do. Those who follow the philosophy of the culture in which we live are guilty of putting cultural preferences above biblical truth, thus causing unbiblical divisions and dissensions within the body of Christ.

### ***Personal standards and observances not rooted in clear biblical teaching but in devotion to a set of religious practices based on personal interpretations, preferences, or ideals***

In Colossians 2:16–23 the apostle Paul warns us about allowing ourselves to be unduly influenced by the opinions, doctrines, and decrees of men that are not rooted in clear teaching of Scripture. He warns us not to allow ourselves to be judged by them nor to allow ourselves to be governed by the commandments and teachings of men. The clear statements of Scripture, not the commandments of men, must govern our life and conduct. Our Lord Jesus warned us of those whose teachings are rooted in the commandments of men and not in God's Word. (Matt. 15:8–9)

### ***Drawing wrong conclusions and teachings from difficult passages***

Drawing dogmatic conclusions from statements of Scripture that are not inherently clear has the potential of doing a lot of damage. Peter warns us in 2 Peter 3:14–18 of the damage that was done by twisting the words of the apostle Paul which were difficult to understand. This had led in some cases to serious errors in Christian faith and practice. We must beware of those who are dogmatic about matters they understand little.

### ***Dealing with people who are convinced or claim that they have a special corner on the truth***

Beware of those who assert that everyone else is wrong and they alone are right. The apostle John very clearly teaches in 1 John 2:26–27 that all of us have an anointing from God the Holy Spirit, who has been given to teach us truth. Those truths that are not apparent to all who believe in the integrity and authority of the Scriptures should be questioned and rejected. At least they should be relegated to the status of opinions and ideas that people have about the teachings of the Scriptures.



## ***Making big issues over minor matters of personal fascination***

Many popular books are sourced in one man's personal fascinations, whether spiritual or theological. In the next generation these fascinations have the potential, if followed, to become another man's aberrations. The apostle Paul warns us in 1 Timothy 1:3–7 about men caught up in fables and endless genealogies, the consequence of these being aimless arguments, controversies, and fruitless discussions. Men who have no depth of scriptural knowledge read their fascinations *into* the Scriptures and ultimately, according to the apostle Paul, neither understand what they are saying nor that about which they make confident assertions. He further warns us in 1 Corinthians 4:6 that we should be careful not to exceed what has been written in the Scriptures.

## ***Drawing wrong conclusions about Christian conduct and requiring others to conform their personal practice to these wrong conclusions***

We are further warned in 1 Timothy 4:1–5 to beware of the arrogance of those who are in a state of spiritual deception. Dogmatically, these men presume to set the standards of conduct for all of the rest of us. Again, our point of reference is always the clear teaching of the Word of God. Our conscience and our conduct must be wholly and solely governed by God's Word—not the whims of others.

## ***Devoting major resources of time and emotion to matters not clearly revealed***

Paul strongly admonished Timothy to avoid fighting about words. In 2 Timothy 2:14–18 he points out that it will benefit no one and will result in the ruin of those who are listening to you. Our business is to accurately and rightly divide the Word of Truth. We are further admonished to avoid worldly and empty chatter. The amount of emotional energy that is consumed on issues not clearly revealed in Scripture is a tragedy. And it is so destructive. Paul points out that it leads only to increased ungodliness and spreads like cancer. So much of the Scripture is clear. We need to concentrate our efforts on the biblical truth that is very clearly revealed in Scripture, not those things that cause division and spiritual destruction. Requiring others to believe that which the Scriptures do not clearly teach is tantamount to adding to the Word of God. This should not be considered acceptable to anyone who claims to believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

## ***Unwisely fighting about issues about which you mistakenly believe that you are both certain and right***

Paul clearly commands those in the ministry not to become involved in foolish and ignorant speculations

(2 Tim. 2:23–26). They will produce only further fights and conflicts. These, he said, must be avoided. God's servant, of moral necessity, must not be caught up in strife or quarreling. A major disqualifier to pastoral ministry is combativeness. (Cf. 1 Tim. 3:3, "no striker").

## ***Arguments with those who are not devoted to the truth and for whom the truth will not settle the argument—because the truth is not their final authority***

The apostle Paul warns Titus that he will find many unruly, rebellious men who talk a lot and deceive others, causing them no longer to believe what is true (Titus 1:10–14). The fruit of their talking is very bitter. Whole families will be overturned and ruined, and the teaching of true doctrine will suffer. Paul further warns Titus that he should not give heed to Jewish myths and the commandments that are given by men who turn themselves away from the truth. Arguing with these people will be fruitless. Paul commanded our response to these kinds of men, of moral necessity, must be to silence them—not further engage or entertain debate with them.

## ***Falling into the trap of engaging in controversy with a foolish, argumentative, combative person***

Paul gave a very clear command to Titus: Avoid foolish questions, genealogies, debates and fightings about the law (3:9)! People who engage in such matters are heretics—they are divisive persons. Engaging them is an effort in futility. There is no profit or gain from such discussions. Those who so promote their philosophical and theological wares are described as perverted, sinning, and self-condemned. The biblical response to them is to warn them, and after the second warning to reject them (Titus 3:9–11).

Most certainly, we as fundamentalists must earnestly contend for the fundamental truths of the Scriptures. But in our battle for truth we are to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Fighting for the fundamental truths of Scripture is one thing. It's quite another to battle over interpretations and opinions concerning things that are not clearly defined in Scripture. We must give heed to Scripture's warnings not to engage in unnecessary conflict and debate—much to the detriment of the cause of God and His Word.

Dr. David C. Innes has served the congregation of the Hamilton Square Baptist Church (San Francisco, California) as its senior pastor since January of 1977.





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# Making Wise Choices

Growing up, I was privileged to spend most of my childhood with limited entertainment options. We had one radio and two telephones. In later years we had a TV without an antenna and a video cassette player. (Remember those?) Now we find ourselves struggling with an onslaught of technology and entertainment that is constantly competing for our affections in almost every area of life. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube . . . the list is ever changing, and the pull often feels inevitable.

One of the main questions we need to answer when considering entertainment's role in our life is what is its effect on our heart and our affections? It requires an honest evaluation of our heart and a determination to protect it. Scripture tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). It also tells us to "keep [our] heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Following are some questions that our family has learned to ask when considering what to allow and some practical suggestions that we have found helpful.

## Are My Choices Allowing Me to Enjoy God?

The first catechism statement that we learned as a family teaches us that "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" (Ps. 73:25–26). God wants us to enjoy Him and find complete satisfaction in Him. Will the content, the time, the emotional energy involved with the choices I am making leave a heart that is fully God's, or will it turn my affections from God?

## Are My Choices Allowing Me to Redeem the Time?

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15–16).

Am I controlling my choices or are they controlling me? There is much that is good and beneficial that can consume all of my time if I do not manage it. What are my priorities? Are my choices allowing me to maintain those priorities? Am I able to put God and family first, friends in my local church before friends met in the community, people that God has providentially placed in my life before long-distant friends whom I have never met? Am I using my time wisely?

## Are My Choices Allowing Me to Obey Psalm 1:1–2?

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

Several years ago our family changed our social-media habits based on this question alone. We were quite literally sitting, in the comfort of our living room, in the seat of the scornful. The excuses to stay engaged took many forms, but we reached the point where we could no longer deny that it was affecting our ability to delight in the law of the Lord.

Psalm 78:7 tells us to teach His law to the next generation so "that they might set their hope in God." It is a sobering consideration that my choices can hinder my children's ability to hope in God.

## Are My Choices Allowing Our Family to Improve Ourselves for God's Service?

When you have free time, what is the default activity you see in your children, your family? Do my children enjoy learning new information and new skills? Are they able to be diligent and follow through even when a task is boring or hard? Are they eager to help even with menial tasks? What is the effect of our entertainment choices on our family's ability and desire to serve?

## Practical Suggestions

These suggestions have helped our family keep entertainment in its rightful place.

We avoid late-night entertainment so that we can give our best to personal worship in the morning or corporate worship on Sundays.

In an effort to avoid growing in our hearts the need to always have the latest and most exciting form of entertainment, we intentionally avoid being on the front end of entertainment. We wait until a movie, a device, new social media are old news before we participate.

We intentionally minimize entertainment in our home by carefully choosing location and limiting screen size. We minimize it by waiting as long as possible before allowing our children to engage in it. Need dictates when e-mail accounts, phones, texting, and social media privileges are given.

The important issue is not what someone else is doing but what do I need to do so that my heart is fully able to enjoy God, to know and love Him, and to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. It is not important that your home looks like mine, or your friend's, or your pastor's. What is important is that you are willing to honestly evaluate your own heart and home and do what is necessary to live soberly and righteously in this present age (Titus 2:11–13).

September Washer is married to David Washer. They homeschool their four children and attend Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.





## Alaska Regional Fellowship

The twenty-seventh annual meeting of the Alaska Regional Fellowship was held on July 30–August 1 at Hamilton Acres Baptist Church in Fairbanks with Bruce Hamilton as host pastor. This was the eleventh time the meeting has been hosted by Hamilton Acres.

The word “Denali” well describes this meeting. “Denali” means “the Great One” and is what the natives call the highest peak in North America (20,300 feet; commonly known as Mount McKinley). Great preaching, great fellowship, and great food were abundant at this meeting. Mike Sproul (Chandler, Arizona) and Jonathan Edwards (Marysville, Utah) were the keynote speakers. Mike brought challenging and convicting messages from Romans 6–8. Jonathan’s messages were practical and timely. Speakers from the state were Pastors Bruce Hamilton, Russ Posey, and Earl Barnett. Lena Hamilton spoke at the ladies’ session.



The Alaska Regional Fellowship is in existence because of the vision of Dr. Hugh Hamilton. After fifty years of ministry with her husband in Alaska, Sue Hamilton went home to heaven on February 26, 2018, and Pastor Hamilton followed exactly four months later on June 26. From the very beginning days of his ministry, Pastor Hugh Hamilton was always drawn to men who stood for the faith, so when he met Drs. James Singleton and Rod Bell, he immediately connected with them and invited them to Alaska. This resulted in the start of a long friendship between these likeminded men of God and the beginning of the Alaska chapter of FBFI. All three of them were examples of faithfulness and are now in glory together, rejoicing in the presence of our great God.





## Wyoming Regional Fellowship

The Wyoming FBFI Regional Fellowship was held on April 23–24 at Friendship Baptist Church of Thayne, Wyoming, under the leadership of Pastor Jay Sprecher. It was joined in partnership with Northwest Baptist Missions and its northeastern regional group of missionaries.

The theme of the meeting—“That I Might by All Means Save Some”—was wonderfully and helpfully supported by conference speakers Pastor Dan Unruh (Westside Baptist Church, Greeley, Colorado), Pastor Ron Ehmann (Northwest Baptist Missions director and pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church, Grantsville, Utah), Pastor Bill Ditges (Central Baptist Church, Hayden, Colorado), and Pastor Mike Holmes (Sinclair Baptist Church, Sinclair, Wyoming).

Attendees included twenty-five pastors, pastors’ wives, and guests in addition to many of the people from Friendship Baptist Church. The states of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, and North Carolina were represented. The numerous fellowship times were encouraged and enhanced by the hospitality shown by the host-church membership.

Plans are ongoing for a 2019 fellowship meeting at the same time next spring.





## NOTABLE QUOTES

**A**nd why so much preaching lost among us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls; I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation.—Richard Baxter

**T**he devil is the enemy of meditation. . . . He knows that meditation is a means to compose a heart and bring it into a gracious frame. Satan is content that you should be hearing and praying Christians so that ye be not meditating Christians; he can stand your small shot, provided that you do not put in this bullet.—Thomas Watson

**J**ustification is never God recognizing and responding to our purity and righteousness, because without his transforming grace, we don't have any. What you and I bring to our relationship with God is desperate spiritual and moral need. We come to him dirtied and burdened by our worldliness, ungodliness, and lack of self-control. We need the power of his justifying and transforming grace to wash us clean and empower us to live in the way that we were created to live.—Paul David Tripp

**H**heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbors, films, football, beer, and above all, gambling filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult. . . . All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary

to make them accept longer working hours or shorter rations. And when they become discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontentment led nowhere, because being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances.—George Orwell

**B**eware of the leaven (destructive forces) of worldly pleasures, for its working is silent but sure, and a little of it will leaven the whole lump (take over and destroy). Keep up the distinction between a Christian and an unbeliever and make it clearer every day. . . . Avoid the appearance of evil. "But we must not be too rigid," says one. There is no fear of that in these days. You will never go too far in holiness, nor become too like your Lord Jesus. If anybody accuses you of being too strict and precise, do not grieve but try to deserve the charge. I cannot suppose that at the last great day our Lord Jesus Christ will say to anyone, "You were not worldly enough."—C. H. Spurgeon

**T**hose who have touched but with one finger the crown of thorns are not so easily wounded by earthly briars.—Francis de Sales

**C**haracter cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.—Helen Keller

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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# ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

I recently spent a little over a week preaching in Australia, and the differences between Aussie English and American English were a frequent topic of conversation. I learned how to say, "Ta, good onya mate" ("Thank you; good for you, friend") with an Australian accent, and my audience laughed uproariously—at me or *with* me, I'm not quite sure. My wife and I thought their attempts at American English were equally funny.

What I found most interesting was actually the Aussies' attitude toward their own English. Multiple Australians told me, "Our English is lazy. We shorten everything we can." Indeed, the grocery store "Woolworth" becomes "Woolies" and, famously, a "barbecue" becomes a "barbie." I heard many other examples. (Of course, they lengthen words, too. "Ward" might become "Wardie," I was told.)

From a linguistics perspective, however, they're too humble about their own accent: it's *not* lazy. It's just as complicated and rule-based as any English dialect, from Standard American English to (British) Received Pronunciation to Canadian and Singaporean and Kenyan and South African Englishes.

Americans tends to have the opposite problem: we think of our language "more highly than [we] ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). Paul's warning against that kind of pride in Romans 12 is very general: though he goes on to apply the warning to spiritual gifts and one's place in the body, I believe that thinking "soberly" about our language is a legitimate application, too. Indeed, pridefully telling others that their speech is wrong is a rather common sin. (Ammon Shea says in *Bad English*, "We all care about language . . . , but the degree to which one is willing to humiliate or upbraid others should not stand as an indication of how much one cares.")

When Aussies say that their English is lazy, they fail to note that every variety of English out there shortens some words over time and lengthens others. My own American tribe does it. We "lazily" say "s'posed-ta" instead of "supposed to." We lengthen "mischievous" and make it "mis-CHEE-vee-us." We "mispronounce" simple words such as "Israel" when they don't fit our speech patterns (we say IS-ree-ul rather than IS-rai-EL). And there's nothing inherently wrong with all this; it's just what happens in language.

I keep taking a battering ram to linguistic pride in this column by trying to show how arbitrary our language customs are. Now, I uphold the customs of my tribe; I labor to produce excellent American English. I just don't think of my English more highly than I ought to. Aussie is lovely, not lazy.

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. is the author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



**Writer's Note:** Originally this series was to include Isaiah 40, but this column covered that passage back in March/April 2011.

Every Bible reader loves this chapter's opening invitation (vv. 1–2), or the invitation to seek the Lord to find mercy (vv. 6–7), or the reminder that God's thoughts are not our thoughts (vv. 8–9), or the assurance that, like the rain and snow, God's words will not return to Him void (vv. 10–11). But how do all those parts fit together? What is the message of this chapter as a unit?

### The Speaker

Isaiah scholar John Oswalt notes that vv. 1–7 contain “12 imperative or jussive verbs, by means of which the prophet implores Israel not to miss what God has for her” (*Isaiah*, II:433). He's quite correct about the imperatives, and the thrust of the text rests on them. But the prophet himself is not the one doing most of the imploring. The opening invitation and promise in vv. 1–5 come directly from Yahweh Himself. How can we tell? Read the chapter carefully and follow the pronominal shifts that indicate the change of speaker throughout the chapter:

- Vv. 1–5a—The first-person pronouns indicate that the speaker is God.
- Vv. 5b–7—The third-person pronouns indicate that the speaker is now Isaiah, talking *about* God.
- Vv. 8–13—Again, the shift back to first-person pronouns indicates that the speaker is God.

### The Audience

The chapter features parallel invitations (55:1–3a and 55:6–7a), followed by parallel promises (55:3b–5 and 55:7b–13). That links the promises described in 55:7b (mercy and pardon) and 12–13 (joy, peace, and productivity) with what is identified in 55:3 as an “everlasting covenant” grounded on “the sure mercies of David” (55:3). The “everlasting covenant” is another OT name for the New Covenant (cf. Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 37:26), which was made expressly “with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31–32). So the original and immediate audience to whom the prophecy is addressed is Israel.

Do these verses, then, have no application to Gentiles? By no means. The New Covenant is grounded and inaugurated in the sacrifice of Christ and ratified by the resurrection of Christ (Heb. 13:20). Because Christ is the ultimate heir to the eternal Davidic throne, His resurrection is a manifestation of the “sure mercies of David”—that is, it validates God's faithfulness to the Davidic Covenant. That's why Paul links Christ's resurrection to Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:33–35).

The New Covenant was made expressly with “the house of Israel, and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31), but God graciously opened the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant—pardon and cleansing from sin, internal transformation, the indwelling Spirit—to the Gentiles as well. And that's why Paul identifies himself and his fellow apostles and associates as “ministers of the new testament [i.e., covenant]” in a letter to a predominantly Gentile church (2 Cor. 3:6). The next two chapters will develop this in more detail.

Because Isaiah 55 is a New Covenant passage, and because the New Covenant was inaugurated by Christ (1 Cor. 11:25) and extended to Gentiles as well (2 Cor. 3:6), its invitation and promises apply “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:10). Revelation 22:17 sounds a lot like Isaiah 55 because it is a universal NT echo of the same New Covenant invitation originally proffered to Israel. Anyone and everyone is invited to find abundant and gracious sufficiency in God (55:1) and exhorted to abandon his own ways and thoughts (55:6) and find mercy and pardon from God (55:7). But that does not erase or replace the primary call and promise of Isaiah 55 to Israel. The Jewish application is contextual and primary; the Gentile application is theological and secondary. It is essential to keep in view that original audience and the contextual application.

### God's Opening Appeal (55:1–5)

The opening appeal to Israel (vv. 1–2) is grounded in vv. 3–5. Paul interprets *the sure mercies of David* in 55:3b as a direct reference to and guarantee of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:34). The resurrection of Christ is a necessary fulfillment of God's loyalty to the Davidic Covenant because Christ is the ultimate seed and eternal heir of David and hence of the covenant promise. The resurrection of Jesus the son of David, in demonstration of God's loyalty to and fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, is the basis of the covenant of peace promised here to Israel. That the Messianic Servant is the one referred to in 55:3–5 is further corroborated by similar previous revelation in the Servant Songs (Isa. 42:6; 49:6, 8).

### Isaiah's Exhortation (55:6–7)

Again, that this is Isaiah is clear from the third-person references to God and especially the possessive pronoun (“our God,” v. 7). Isaiah echoes God's invitation with his own exhortation to seek the Lord (literally) *while He allows Himself to be found*. God's claims are not to be shelved for leisurely consideration later. They must *call on Him while He is near*. The implication is that if He is ignored, He will leave. But if they will seek and call now, they will certainly find mercy and pardon now.



# —Chapter 55

## God's Appeal Continued (55:8–13)

Once more, the speaker shifts to God directly as he reasons with his people in a series of interconnected causal arguments. The grammatical connector “for” (*kiy* in vv. 8, 9, 10, 12) ties this section together as a successive conceptual unit. The unrighteous need to forsake their own thoughts and ways and return to God for mercy . . .

- Because their ways and thoughts are not like God's (v. 8).
- Because God's ways and thoughts are higher than man's (v. 9).
- Because every word from God is purposeful, effectual, and infallible, just like the rain and snow from heaven (v. 10).
- Because God will certainly send on the nation the unprecedented blessings He has promised in the New Covenant.

So anyone who wants to enjoy and participate in those blessings must seek God and forsake his sin in order to find God's mercy and pardon, because He will certainly do exactly what He has said.

## Applying a Text Contextually

It is a controversial but necessary observation that 55:10–11 is not primarily about the effectiveness of God's Word whenever we use it. That may be a secondary application, but it is not the primary meaning of the passage, nor is it God's primary application within the passage itself. It is primarily about the trustworthiness of God's words whenever He speaks.

The conventional application of Isaiah 55:10–11 is that whenever we quote a verse to someone, or include a passage in a post, or preach a message, or teach a children's Bible club, God's Word will always have whatever impact God intends it to have—even if these communications may seem to us at the time to receive no welcome from the hearers. That's true, but not because Isaiah 55 promises it. It's true because God is the Lord of providence and because other passages teach it (e.g., Jer. 23:29; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12).

Isaiah 55:10–11 is not a general promise that whenever we speak God's words they will be effective and powerful. It is a specific promise that whatever God speaks, that's what will happen. It's about the infallible content of God's words when He speaks, not the inherent power of God's words when we speak them. Whatever God says, however astonishing or unimaginable, cannot fail to happen exactly as He says. “Want proof?” God asks. “Just wait! Everything I have spoken will be so. Not one syllable will echo back unfulfilled.”

When read in its own context, the thrust of God's meteorological metaphor is as clear as rainwater: “Just as the rain cannot fall on the earth without fulfilling the role God gave it, so God's words cannot fall from God's mouth in heaven without fulfilling the role God gave them on earth. God does not make impotent threats or empty promises; when he talks people should listen, because what he says is exactly what will happen” (Smith 2009, 511).

The point of vv. 10–11 is that God's words/promises are *purposeful* (they have a design), *effectual* (they possess the power to accomplish what they pronounce), and therefore *infallible* (they cannot fail to accomplish their pronouncements). Elihu describes God as sending ice and rain “by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy” (Job 37:10–13). God Himself uses this very precipitation illustration in Isaiah 55 to describe the *purposefulness*, *effectualness*, and *infallibility* of everything He pronounces and promises. However amazing, improbable, or unimaginable it may sound to you or me, if God said it, then He will do it just like He said it.

## Structural Outline

- I. God's Appeal (1–5)
  - A. Invitation Issued: *Come to Me* (1–2a)
    1. Subjects of invitation: the needy (1)
    2. Reasoning of the invitation: the folly of all alternatives (2a)
  - B. Invitation Clarified: *Hear and heed Me* (2b–3a)
  - C. Assurance: *My covenant promise* (3b–5)
    1. Nature of promise: an everlasting covenant (3b)
    2. Ground of promise: sure mercies of David (4)
    3. Content of the promise: international spiritual prominence (5)
- II. Prophet's Exhortation (6–7)
  - A. Invitation: *Seek God while you can* (6)
  - B. Invitation Clarified: *Forsake your ways and thoughts and return to God* (7a)
  - C. Assurance: *Mercy and pardon* (7b)
- III. God's Appeal Continued (8–13)
  - A. My ways and thoughts are not like yours (8–9)
  - B. My promises are purposeful, effectual, infallible, and gracious (10–11)
    1. Analogy (10)
    2. Explanation of Analogy (11)
    3. Application of Analogy: New Covenant promises will be fulfilled because God has said so (12–13)

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of Theology & Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina, and blogs regularly at [www.Theologyin3D.com](http://www.Theologyin3D.com).

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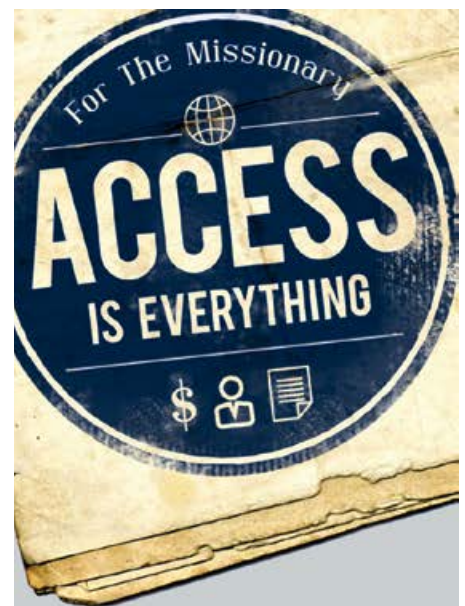
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## “Don’t Just Do Something—Stand There!”

### Confessions of a Trauma Chaplain

As a resident in Clinical Pastoral Education (the required training for certification as a health care chaplain), I often find myself walking several miles a day inside a large hospital. And, as the Emergency Room chaplain for fifteen months, my duties included responding to all incoming traumas. Hiking from the far side of the hospital to the ER, I was aware of pain in my leg and ankle and was thankful that I had my cane. When I arrived at the trauma bay, I was immediately reminded of a poignant statement usually attributed to Helen Keller: “I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” Like the medical staff, I saw horrific injuries on a daily basis, but that day I saw the most badly broken ankle imaginable: a clean break with the leg bone completely exposed and the foot barely connected! The elderly man had fallen out of a tree!

And yet the doctors and nurses who work in Trauma are seldom surprised at what comes through the door. They remain calm, professional, and focused on the task at hand. How do they do that? Is their professionalism a matter of personality or is it a learned skill? In part it can be learned in the classroom, but it is mastered in practice. It has to be developed in the clinical setting through an internship and residency. Similarly, health-care chaplains must develop these skills. These chaplains are not just pastors who make visits in hospitals. They are health-care professionals who

work as part of the treatment team to help patients get well and return to their lives outside the hospital. It takes long, hard hours of work to develop the skills and behavior required. Like doctors, chaplains must have completed a significant amount of education in order to begin their practical training. And, like military chaplains, they are required to have reached several ministry milestones even to apply for the opportunity to train.

The applicant must hold an MDiv or equivalent number of hours in seminary, be ordained, and be endorsed by an approved endorsing agency. In training, the prospective health-care chaplain will complete a minimum of 1000 hours of clinical contact with patients, completing four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). There are ratings beyond this basic certification, up to and including Board Certification, which requires an additional 2000 hours of clinical contact in a structured program. The clinical and classroom work is obtained from a hospital approved by the ACPE (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education).

My interest in chaplaincy began when I became a Christian under the influence of soulwinners who were challenged by a godly chaplain in the US Air Force. While serving as the pastor of Faith Baptist Church from 1977 to 2007, I took advantage of local chaplaincy opportunities. My son was interested in the cadet program of the Civil Air



Patrol, an Air Force Auxiliary. He became a CAP cadet, and I became the Squadron Chaplain. After a few years there, our local police chief recruited me to become the Chaplain of the Police Department, where I served from 1987 to 2013. In 2003 I became the endorser for FBFI, and in 2011 I defended a dissertation on "The Extension of Fundamental Baptist Local Church Ministry through Military and Law Enforcement Chaplaincy." I later wrote a small book titled *Courage and Compassion—The Ministry of Law Enforcement*.

It was in the context of this varied chaplaincy ministry that I entered into the fifteen-month certification program in Clinical Pastoral Education through the Greenville Hospital System. A sincere friend asked me, "What will they teach you that you don't already know?" I knew I had a lot to learn, but I was confident that my pastoral ministry provided a solid foundation for chaplaincy—and it was just that, a foundation. Effective health-care ministry had yet to be built on that foundation. As a pastor of a growing congregation, I served people who expected me to enter into their pains and crises with words of wisdom and comfort. They expected me to have Bible principles ready to speak into their needs. They had questions, and they wanted answers. When others stand by waiting for someone to take charge, pastors do not just observe, they act. "Don't just stand there—do something!" is the admonition we learn to give ourselves.

But in the trauma bay the chaplain's role is not that of the physician. The trauma bay is very much like a combat field hospital. Saving lives demands urgency, action, split-second decisions, motion economy, and attention riveted to the task at hand. The choreography of the treatment team is like that of a professional basketball team. The uninitiated observer struggles to follow the dizzying pace. The chaplain is nearby to bring calm into chaos, a spiritual presence into physical suffering, tranquility into tragedy. Health-care chaplaincy helps both the patient and the chaplain. It not only allows the skillful pastor to reach great numbers of people with great needs, it also allows him to grow into a more trusting shepherd of God's sheep: to learn a spiritual lesson that the flesh will seldom accept: "Don't just do something—stand there."

Dr. John C. Vaughn (below, center) is the past president and chaplain endorser of FBFI. He holds the Doctor of Pastoral Theology degree from Bob Jones University and is an ACPE certified chaplain.



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# King David's Good Friend Hushai

In 2 Samuel 15 we read the heartbreaking account of Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David. Absalom was a deceitful and cunning young man; 2 Samuel 15:6 says that he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel." He wanted to be king instead of his father, and here was his plan as recorded in verse 10: "But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron." In verse 12 we read just how effective his plan was: "And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom." In fact, it was so strong that King David had to flee from his own son! Second Samuel 15:13-14 says, "And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."

But in this dark and devastating time in David's life, the Scriptures tell us he had a friend. Second Samuel 15:37 says, "So Hushai David's friend came into the city." It is wonderful to have a friend like Hushai in difficult times. Proverbs 17:17 states, "A friend loveth at all times."

David was very wise and was going to use Hushai to be a spy for him and help him defeat Absalom. His instructions to Hushai are as follows in verses 34-37:

But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall

send unto me every thing that ye can hear. So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

What a masterful plan! But it would never have worked without the true friendship of Hushai. We cannot help but admire the courage of Hushai in putting his own life at risk. If Absalom had discovered his father's plan, he no doubt would have killed Hushai. But true friendship will not waver, even in facing the possible consequence of death. John 15:13 says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

When Absalom saw Hushai come to him in Jerusalem, he asked him in 2 Samuel 16:17, "Why wentest thou not with thy friend?" Hushai wisely answered, "And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence" (2 Sam. 16:19). Absalom was pleased at what Hushai said and believed him. Then he sought his counselor Ahithophel for advice in overthrowing his father. Ahithophel said in 2 Samuel 17:1, "Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night." Verse 4 says, "And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel." Then Absalom wanted to hear the counsel of Hushai. So he said in verse 7, "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time." The suggestions Hushai gave were so convincing that we read in verse 14, "And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom."

The Lord did intervene, and King David was spared from defeat. He used David's loyal friend Hushai to see this accomplished. Our prayer ought to be that God would give us such godly friends and counselors in our own lives.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC, 29684 or via e-mail at [evangjsivn@aol.com](mailto:evangjsivn@aol.com).





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