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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



Growing in
Small Groups

Growing in Small Groups



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In America, big churches are getting bigger

and small churches are getting smaller. According to the Hartford Institute and Leadership Network, America boasted 150 “mega-churches” (2000 or more in the congregation) in 1980 and is home to nearly 2000 of them today. Simultaneously, the median attendance of over 300,000 American churches declined from 129 in 2000 to 80 in 2015. On Sunday mornings many churchgoers are lost in an impersonal crowd while others feel as though they are standing out in a shrinking congregation. As congregations expand and contract, there is an increasing focus on the fulfillment found in small groups.

The 120 who gathered in the Upper Room before Pentecost enjoyed a sense of urgency and intimacy. Acts 1:13–14 identifies one of every ten in attendance by name. Since we know that the unnamed sons of Mary were James and Jude and we are introduced to Joseph and Matthias when they are nominated to take the place of Judas, we can still cite the names of sixteen in attendance

at the pre-Pentecost prayer meeting. Soon, the Holy Spirit will come (Acts 2:4) and the 120 prayer warriors will be enlarged to meet in the Temple (Acts 2:46) and divide in “breaking bread from house to house.”

Making disciples has always required multiplication by division. Most often, large churches started out as small groups. Sometimes believers gather in small groups because of persecution. At other times, small groups are formed in order to enhance association. Whether by accident or by design, small groups have always been a part of making ministry mighty.

This edition of *FrontLine* magazine is dedicated to small groups. The articles published here will introduce you to Bible studies that became churches, military bases that experienced revival, and international groups that found a home in American churches through the use of small groups. There is spiritual strength to be found when believers gather in small groups.

Dr. Chuck Phelps pastors Colonial Hills Baptist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, and serves as the vice-chairman of FBFI.



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ANNOUNCING

The Fundamentals for the 21st Century



In 1917 the Bible Institute of Los Angeles printed a collection of articles—edited by R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, and many others—called *The Fundamentals*. Leaders from all realms of fundamentalism made contributions. The articles identified and clarified the fundamentals of the faith as distinctive from what had become liberal mainline Christianity. The series has been reprinted in a four-volume set by Baker Books, and the content is still extremely useful.

Over one hundred years later we still face many of the same challenges that our predecessors did, but we also face new controversies they did not anticipate. In that spirit, we will be publishing a twenty-first-century supplement to *The Fundamentals*, identifying and addressing the new theological and practical matters we face today.

We will be dedicating eight successive issues of *FrontLine* magazine to this purpose. The editors for these publications are already in place.

David Shumate (International Baptist Seminary) will be

editing two issues, one on bibliology and another on ecclesiology. Kevin Bauder (Central Baptist Seminary) will be editing an issue on the doctrine of Creation and its present-day implications. Ken Rathbun (Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary) will be editing the issue on hermeneutics and Bible interpretation. Steve Hankins (Bob Jones Seminary) will be addressing present-day concerns in the area of soteriology. Mark Herbster and Larry Oats (Maranatha Baptist Seminary) will be overseeing two issues on the subjects of theology proper, eschatology, and worship.

Each publication is intended to be substantial in content but written at the layman's level so it can be useful as a teaching tool in the local church ministry, military chapel, and on the mission field.

If you have not previously subscribed to *FrontLine*, this would be a good time to sign up. Consider joining the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International. Your membership to FBFI includes a subscription to *FrontLine* magazine.

Pastoral Reflections on an Ancient Model of Ministry

The term “small groups” may be recent, but the concept is not. Numerous denominations and multiple generations within professing Christianity have implemented small-group methods with great benefit to their particular movement. Various forms of small groups can be observed among early Baptists in America as well as some Puritans. Small groups are intrinsic to early Methodism and are clearly a part of many current church models. Acknowledging this does not mean agreement with all of these groups, of course, but it does recognize the effectiveness of the method.

In light of the history and widespread use of small groups, the faithful pastor must first determine, however, if the concept of small groups can be traced to Scripture. The more I study the Bible in my pastoral ministry, the more I realize that the general concept of the small group is at least as old as the New Testament itself. Although I have yet to fully implement the small-group method in my ministry, with the exception of some of our regular Sunday school classes, there are undeniable benefits of small groups that appeal to me as a pastor.

Christ's Model

The first benefit I see is that it follows the model of Christ's earthly ministry. A basic survey of the life of Christ demonstrates clearly that He practiced a twofold method of communicating and applying divine truth. Jesus is regularly seen preaching and teaching in a public setting to great crowds during His earthly ministry. However, He is just as frequently seen in private settings, explaining and applying the truth—often in greater detail—to His disciples. Mark records that

Christ “ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (3:14). And “when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (4:34). Undoubtedly, Christ's private interactions with His small group of disciples was as formative as, if not more formative than, His public ministry in shaping these men who would “turn the world upside down.”

Multigenerational Leadership

A second benefit that appeals to my pastoral heart and mind is that small groups help to develop multigenerational leadership. As we've already noted, not only is this illustrated in Christ's preparation of His disciples (Mark 3:13–14; 4:10, 34), but it is also witnessed throughout Christian history. In 1755 the Separate Baptist preacher Shubal Stearns moved to North Carolina from Connecticut to plant the Sandy Creek Baptist Church near present-day Greensboro. He would be used of God to spark a church-planting movement that is still a marvel to this day. By the time Stearns graduated to heaven in 1771, a total of forty-two Baptist churches had been planted in just seventeen years. Even more significant, however, is the fact that 125 young preachers had been prepared to carry on the work of the ministry.¹ These young men were trained as they travelled with Stearns and his associates between preaching points in the backwoods of the Carolinas and Virginia. Not having the benefit of Bible colleges, they were educated by a somewhat informal small-group method around campfires and on horseback. They were literally discipled “in the saddle,” and the fruit of this method is self-evident. By 1790 this body of churches had grown to 410, and then numbered into the thousands by the

mid-nineteenth century.² It could be said that the Bible Belt, in part, is the product of the small-group training of young preachers for multigenerational leadership.

Guided Atmosphere

A third benefit is that small groups provide a guided atmosphere for interactive transparency—and we cannot miss the word “guided.” Here is a caveat: an accusation regularly leveled against small groups is that they are pools of ignorance, which result from free-for-all spouting of shallow opinions. A critical description goes something like this: “George, what do you think this passage means? Jane, what do you think? Bill, what about you? Tom, do you have anything to add to this?” When the time is up, the participants have no more idea what the passage means nor how to apply it than when they first came. Because the meeting was unguided and aimless, it became pointless. Sadly, this kind of scenario may give the small-group concept a bad name. The answer, however, is not to dispense with the method but rather to direct it. Ensuring that small groups stay on task will require hard work, training, and preparation for those who lead them. Small groups will inevitably devolve into *gossip* sessions instead of *grounding* sessions if they are not first *guided* sessions! This being said, a properly guided group does provide a conducive atmosphere for individuals to interact transparently with questions, comments, and, yes, even the admission of personal struggles and growing pains. Think about the New Testament revelation that we have on certain issues only because of dialog recorded from a private, small-group setting. This dialog, I might add, would never have taken place in public. The embarrassed disciples asked Christ, once they were in private, why they were powerless for ministry, and He told them (Mark 9:28–29). Vital instruction on how to pray resulted from a question asked by a single disciple to Christ in a private setting, after he had observed Christ praying (Luke 11:1–4). Christ’s parables would seem little more than quaint stories without the inspired record of the disciples’ private, small-group inquiry, followed by Christ’s interpretive exposition (Matt. 13:34ff). The benefit of the small-group setting for providing a guided atmosphere for transparent interaction is undeniable. Our Bible would not be what it is without the record of it!

Application of Truth

A fourth benefit that appeals to me as a pastor is that the small-group method encourages a more thorough and specific application of truth in the individual life. This in no way discounts or diminishes the public proclamation of God’s Word. Here again is another caveat. The small-group method cannot displace the declarative preaching of the Bible. This pitfall must be avoided. Churches that replace a corporate preaching service with small-group gatherings are hurting themselves immeasurably. Any small-group method should be viewed not as a substitute for preaching but as a supplement to preaching and as subservient to the purpose and function of the local church. Richard Baxter, the nonconformist Puritan pastor of seventeenth-century England, understood the importance of small-group instruction as a vital supplement to his preaching ministry. In private settings, he was able to make more thorough and specific application of the truth to his hearers. He testified that “long unprofitable hear-

ers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten years’ public preaching.”³ And, lest any of his readers should think that he was diminishing public preaching, in the very next sentence he asserted that public preaching is still the “most excellent means” for communicating God’s Word. This being said, Baxter recognized the important role of small-group interaction as a supplement to preaching, since it provided the opportunity for more thorough and specific application of the truth to individual lives.

A final benefit I see from the small-group method is that it promotes mutual accountability and prayer support among believers. It is difficult for passages such as Romans 15:14 and Hebrews 10:24–25 to be applied fully without some form of small-group interaction in the local church. Admonishing one another, exhorting one another, and considering one another to provoke one another to love and to good works cannot reasonably occur by just sitting in the pew and then going home! Accountable interaction beyond the surface level must happen, and the small-group setting cultivates this. When John Wesley founded Methodism, he discovered the need for small-group accountability among his followers quite unexpectedly. In purchasing a meeting place, the Methodists incurred a monthly mortgage. So a penny per week was to be collected from each member to help make the payments. Wesley divided the entire congregation into groups of twelve (I wonder where he got this number) and designated a leader over each group. The leaders went house-to-house weekly to gather pennies, but they got something more than they bargained for. They found some men quarreling with their wives and others drinking. Apparently, the church members knew the General Principles of Methodism, but were struggling to follow them. More than the collection of pennies, Wesley realized that souls needed to be watched over and cultivated through regular accountability. Weekly small-group meetings were subsequently scheduled for this very purpose. Each member was asked the question, “How is your spiritual life?” Small-group accountability reinforced the General Principles of Methodism and helped individual believers to grow in their sanctification. As a result of these meetings, Methodism flourished in England and America, illustrating the benefit of biblical accountability provided by small groups.⁴

Regardless of the name it is given or the specific ways it is implemented in a local church, the small-group method has undeniable benefits that appeal to me as pastor. My personal prayer is that I will faithfully pursue biblical methods to shepherd the flock Christ has entrusted to me.

Nathan Deatrick planted and pastors the Crossroads Baptist Church of Columbus, North Carolina. He and his wife, Jenny, have been married for twenty years, and God has blessed them with four children.



¹ Lumpkin, William L., *Baptist History in the South* (Shelbyville, TN: Bible and Literature Missionary Foundation, 1995), p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³ Baxter, Richard, *The Reformed Pastor* (Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA, 1997), p. 196.

⁴ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/disciples-making-disciples-life-transforming-small-groups>. Site accessed January 3, 2019.

Gathering the Nations

People who were born in some other country live near your church. That statement would have been true of only a small percentage of American churches twenty years ago. Today it is true of nearly all of them.

The peoples of the world are coming in increasing number and from an expanding list of nations, to make their home in the United States. Could the Lord enable us to put together a missionary effort to see them saved, discipled, and added to our churches?

In the past, reaching immigrants to America meant, for the most part, establishing ethnically-oriented churches, with messages in a language other than English, hymns not in Isaac Watts' original rendering, and fellowship adapted to an other-than-American style. This effort, earnestly and ably enjoined by many fervent believers, required expert personnel. Many times it required missionaries' returning from the foreign field to jumpstart such ministries.

Ethnic church planting in the United States also required adequate meeting space. Existing churches that wanted to help opened their doors to immigrant groups, but this required the newcomers to meet at an odd hour. Purchasing a building of their own proved a daunting challenge.

If limited personnel and physical resources weren't sufficient obstacles, ethnic churches also faced the ticking time bomb of cultural adaptation. The children and young adults of immigrants quickly find English to be their language of choice. A church in America that speaks in a foreign language (with the possible exception of Spanish, due to the high number of Spanish-speaking immigrants and their ability to function in the States without learning English) will soon have to provide translation into English if they want any of their children or young people to adequately understand their

sermons and lessons. Consequently, many well-intentioned efforts were not lasting.

An Historic Problem

Making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) was the motivating command for early Christians, but that meant that local churches of the first century faced cross-cultural ministry problems too. Paul laid out a framework for the translation of messages at church for the believers in Corinth: "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret" (1 Cor. 14:27). If there wasn't anyone to interpret, then a man who could minister had to refrain until the sermon could be delivered to the congregation through an interpreter.

That need to translate the message for non-English speaker is a huge obstacle for many American churches. When a believer sees the need for international outreach stateside, he may start carrying gospel tracts in a foreign language. It is wonderful to give the gospel in such a way, and many newcomers are open to receiving the gospel this way (if for no other reason than that they are starving to see something written in their mother tongue!). But, as one pastor expressed it, "I was sad that that was all I could do. I could give out a tract, but if that person responded to the gospel and came to my church there was nothing for him there."

A solution that would meet the needs of newcomers to our country and give them access to the blessings available in our churches is what is needed. Small-group Bible studies tailored to the international community are an important piece of the cross-cultural ministry challenge that presents itself to churches in America today.

An International Small Group meeting, primarily tailored for adults and older teens who often have the greatest difficulty assimilating to American culture,



allows immigrants to hear the Word of God in their own language. It also allows them to pray and sing among believers who either know or are learning their language. It makes them a part of an existing Bible-believing church where they learn English and American culture from fellowshiping with local Christians, while also meeting their immediate spiritual needs in a language and context they can readily understand.

A Twenty-First-Century Solution

What would an International Small Group meeting look like at your church? It can, and should, fit into the framework of your regular meeting times. In fact, by offering such a group at the same time as your existing Sunday school classes, you help the children of immigrants (likely already studying in English at school) to join in the classes available to their age groups.

Perhaps you are wondering, “Just exactly how is that possible?” Here is a suggested approach:

1. With the notes of a gospel message that you already have, you can use Microsoft Translator or Google Translate to do an initial translation. After running your notes through an electronic translation service, send your translated materials to a missionary or a friend who speaks the language for polishing.
2. Put the location and time of your International Small Group on the printout of the translated gospel message. Include a texting phone number (important because you can use the Google Translate app to understand and reply to foreign-language texts if you don’t speak the language).
3. Take a three- or four-part Sunday school lesson and isolate the main points to be translated, again using Google Translate or Microsoft Translator (short sentences are easier for machine translators to handle). Include the full texts of each Scripture you include in the lesson. A good resource for Bible texts in many languages is found at wordproject.org.
4. Use your gospel message in the target language to reach out. With your translation work in hand, you can invite internationals to learn more of the gospel message at your church. Communicate via text to announce the time and ensure that the international group is coming. Teach your lesson (printed out in the target language). When necessary use translation apps to help bridge the understanding gap.
5. Make sure the International Small Group members know that your church is committed to ministering to them and that they should invite other newcomers to join them. Secure Bibles and hymnbooks in the target language so that they are ready for use.
6. Add other outreach platforms to give the gospel to this group, such as ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, holiday celebrations, or “family life in America” weekend seminars.

A Real-Life Example

Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, partnered with a Filipino missionary couple initiating Filipino home Bible studies, which became a Filipino Sunday school class and fellowship. Filipinos who had already adjusted to American culture took advantage of the opportunity to invite their unchurched Filipino friends because they knew that their fellow Filipinos would enjoy being around others from their homeland during the Sunday school hour and that each Sunday they would be able to meet Americans who loved the Lord. This integrated model (foreign-language small group, local-language worship) built a bridge of local-church blessings for many Filipinos.

While having someone who knows the language and culture can be a huge benefit to a ministry, not having such a person should not preclude churches from organizing small groups for the internationals who are moving into their neighborhoods. Readily available and free, technology makes foreign-language Bible teaching a possibility for any church in America today.

After seeing the blessings of a Filipino ministry, leaders at Colonial Hills asked, “Could we start a ministry like this for other ethnic groups in our area?” A recently arrived group of immigrants from Congo seemed to be in need and were looking for help that the church could supply. The trouble was providing an ongoing weekly ministry without an able minister who spoke Swahili or French.

An adult small group was started for the Congolese believers that met at the same time as the other Sunday school classes. This allowed the adults from Congo to sing, pray, and study the Word in Swahili while their children were taking part in the English-oriented classes for children. The material prepared for the other Adult Bible Fellowship classes was translated each week into Swahili. An adult Swahili speaker or one of the Congolese teens was called upon to help the teacher with live translation. Sometimes, when a translator wasn’t available, the lesson was read from the Swahili notes and the teacher and students worked together to make sure the main text of Scripture was understood by everyone.

The Congolese class has grown, and visitors to the class have become regular attendees. Some have been saved. Challenges arose, as in all ministries, but the International Small Group arrangement continues to give the church a platform from which to minister to this immigrant group and see the Lord meet their needs.

Small-group Bible study can be an encouraging addition to the ministries your church already provides for its members. But for international newcomers it can mean the difference between thriving in America or merely surviving in their adoptive homeland. Take advantage of the God-ordained opportunities springing up all across the United States to “teach all nations” without ever leaving your own country.

Matthew Barfield is the vice president of Field Ministries of International Partnership Ministries and is working in cooperation with Colonial Hills Baptist Church (Indianapolis, Indiana) to help American churches reach immigrants. For more information visit REV5nine.org.



Those who have attend the morning services of Falls Baptist Church of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, immediately notice something “different.” It has been that way for over twenty years, and it is no accident. The difference isn’t the preaching (though it is always a blessing), nor is the difference the music (though it too is exceptional); the difference is in the Adult Bible Fellowship Hour. Unlike many churches offering large, lecture-style classes, Falls Baptist is well-known for its “Round-Table Classes.” The tables are everywhere, and around them you will find no more than ten believers joined in fellowship and Bible study. Is Falls seeking to be novel? No, Falls is seeking to be biblically intentional.

Throughout His earthly ministry, “great multitudes of people” followed Jesus (Matt. 4:25, *et al.*) to see His miraculous acts and to hear His marvelous teachings. However, even a casual reading of the Gospels indicates that Jesus was focused more on individuals than on the great crowds. As the gospel story unfolds, Jesus narrows His focus primarily to twelve specific, yet ordinary, men (Matt. 10:1–5). Mark describes this group as ordained to “be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14).

These twelve were not His means to more listeners and greater crowds of hearers; He already had that. This group was His means to more leaders and more laborers. These men were called His “disciples,” and these are the ones He was training to send out (Luke 6:13).

Disciple-making is central to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), and Jesus’ example was that of disciple-making, not just convert-gaining. Disciple-making doesn’t happen only in large gatherings; it requires time spent one-on-one and in small groups. This is the heartbeat of the round-table Adult Bible Fellowship at Falls Baptist.

Small Groups Make Disciples

Gathering twenty-first-century believers into small groups allows a re-creation of the very dynamic that transformed twelve men into humble, Spirit-filled, sold-out servants of God. Just as Jesus began His earthly ministry by establishing a “small group,” many ministries find small groups to be the most effective method of building disciples today.

Just as these twelve men walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry and watched His powerful life working around them and in them, so, today, believers connected to one another in local church small groups can walk with the risen Christ as His powerful life works in and through them. The potential for small groups is great—as great as the Great Commission! At Falls Baptist Church we like to say, “Our small group exists to discover Jesus in His Word, obey Jesus in our week, and share Jesus in our world, making disciples who multiply and fulfill the Great Commission in our local area.” Our purpose statement is inspired by our Lord’s example.



Intentional Discipleship at Round Tables

Small Groups Mobilize Disciples

Jesus taught that discipleship and love are intrinsically linked to obedience (John 14:15, 21–24; 15:10). Small groups are the best context for mutual encouragement and accountability to do “whatsoever he sayeth” (John 2:5) and to live a life of obedience and boldness for Christ.

Though it may seem obvious, a small group is made up of enough people to truly be a group, yet small enough to not be large. We like to think in terms of approximately four-to-ten people. Gatherings of two or three often operate more like a one-on-one discipleship meeting (which has its important place in other contexts). Conversely, a group larger than ten begins to operate more like a large group, where individuals feel less free to participate and may be tempted to hide in the crowd. Small groups should be designed to allow each member to participate and be edified by one another (Gal. 6:2) so that they might “obey Jesus in their week and share Jesus in their world.”

An effective small-group meeting will take time. It cannot just be squeezed into a busy church schedule. Small groups must be prioritized and maintained with purpose. There are three important dimensions to an effective small-group meeting where disciples are being equipped to multiply. Each of these dimensions is crucial to the Great Commission success of the group. If one of these three dimensions is missing, the small group time becomes *flat*. These three dimensions form the “three thirds” of a dynamic Discovery Bible Study and should be given near equal time.

The First Third: Looking Back. Each time the small group meets, they should first engage in a warm, relational community time. Three key questions are discussed in these opening minutes together: What are you thankful for this week? How did you obey or share what we learned last week? What needs do you have to pray for?

Community time should include a time of focusing on the vision for the group (as defined by the group’s vision statement), prayer for one another’s needs, giving thanksgiving for what God is doing in the group members, and asking for understanding in the Bible study to follow.

The Second Third: Looking Up. In this portion of the meeting the group engages in a Discovery Bible Study. A Discovery Bible Study is a simple, mutual discovery of God’s will in His Word, not a time for one person (even the group leader) to dominate and lecture others. In this type of Bible study, each member is earnestly listening for the Lord Jesus to speak to him directly through His Word to the end that he might obey whatever the Lord says and experience the reality of His presence (John 14:21).

We have found a good Discovery Bible Study considers four fundamental questions of the text: What is happening in this passage? What do we discover about God? What do we discover about people? How does the truth in this Bible passage change how we see God, how we treat others, or how we live?

The Discovery Bible Study process is central to the small-group meeting and is complete only when each member hears from God himself and knows what he needs to do to obey the passage.

This second section can end well when each member writes

out an “I will” statement that is practical and measurable. This should be a goal that can be realistically accomplished in the next twenty-four-to-forty-eight hours. Each member is encouraged to share his “I will” statement with the others and make a sincere commitment to obey the Lord as soon as possible.

The Third Third: Looking Ahead. This is a time of training and sending. Just as Christ sent out His group (Luke 9:1–6), effective small groups ought to be purposefully dismissed. A winning football team needs the huddle to determine the next play, but they will not win the game unless they actually execute that play! Small groups may enjoy their time of “huddle,” but the real work is done outside of the meeting in the harvest field of life.

The part of the group meeting answers the question, “With whom will I share the truth I learned today?” As the Discovery Bible Study is concluded, each group member is encouraged to write out a bridge statement, using the truth just discovered in the Word, which will help him *bridge* from an ordinary conversation to a spiritual/gospel conversation with a loved one or friend (or even a perfect stranger!).

Alongside the bridge statement, the group should also memorize a key verse from the passage. In order to train each small-group member, a brief time should be set aside for each member to practice sharing the truth learned. Each member ought to be given a moment to “practice” his bridge statement with another person in the group and quote his verse. This extra step may seem excessive, but members of small groups often profit by practicing truth-filled conversation before enjoying a truth-filled conversation in the field. By doing this the group dismisses to accomplish goals. They are dedicated to the task and commissioned to it in prayer.

Small Groups Multiply Disciples

By their very design, small groups are an ideal environment for new disciples to be assimilated into the community of the local church. This is why small groups actually multiply as group members are trained and sent in order to reach and bring new disciples to their small group meetings.

Any small group can enjoy good Christian fellowship around Bible study, sharing personal prayer requests, and giving thanksgiving for God’s working in their life. However, a small group will grow and multiply only when its members are committed to the powerful pathway of obedience and sharing. Discovering Jesus, obeying Jesus, and sharing Jesus together with a small group of other disciples can change ordinary believers into multiplying believers (2 Tim. 2:2).

For a community to be saturated with the gospel, it will require a movement of individual believers being equipped and sent out through small groups to effectively fulfill the Great Commission in their own networks of friends, families, coworkers, and neighbors. Small-group ministry reflects the belief that every member of the local church is commissioned by Christ and gifted by the Spirit to make disciples who multiply and are a direct part of building up the local church (Eph. 4:1–16). Therefore, the entire church should be organized, equipped, and commissioned to fulfill this task.

Micah Shultz has been on staff at Falls Baptist Church in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, for almost twenty years. He has spent most of those years working with small groups in youth ministry. The past five years he has been the assistant pastor for Outreach and Development and helps lead the adult small groups.



Overcoming

Over twenty-two years ago the church I pastor moved from a traditional Wednesday night service to small, discussion-oriented groups focusing on the application of the Sunday morning message. Our leadership saw a great deal of Bible teaching in our various groups, but we were concerned that there was not a great deal of practical application of how to live out the preached Word from the Sunday pulpit.

We developed a system to help the small-group leaders: the sermon outline is in the bulletin across the page from the small-group lesson. I teach our people that the sermon is like a teacher reviewing for the test and that in the small group, understanding and application of the review take place. The people internalize the truths from Sunday's message so that they can explain the practical impact of these truths in their lives. If our people cannot explain that, then the pulpit really has not communicated God's eternal Word in a manner that is understandable for them to use in ministry. Our motto is "Ministers—Every Member!" Our Care Groups are one of the prime places for us to fulfill this motto of producing true ministering disciples.

Each small group—whether Sunday school, ladies Bible study, or an interactive discussion group—*must* have no more than four primary purposes. Our midweek small groups have four: assimilation, accountability, application, and advancement of leadership. Our Adult Bible Fellowships (the adult Sunday school hour) has two: Bible study and fellowship. We hold our morning service at 9:15 a.m. and the ABF hour at 10:45 a.m. to encourage a higher percentage of attendance to ABFs.

What are some of the challenges of this philosophy of ministry?

1. **"We've never done it that way before."** We tend to worship the form of our church rather than its actual purpose or function. We forget that the great Wesley and Whitefield revivals were centered on small-group, midweek discussion groups and in-home Bible studies.
2. **"Leaders" no longer can sit and nod; they have to talk.** This can lead to complaining about other issues, but the real issue is the expectation that these long-time pillars in the church can actually converse about the message after it is preached.
3. **Training leaders to direct interactive discussion is difficult since leading a group is more of an art than a science.**
4. **Groups can stray away from the message and form theological cliques and divisions.**
5. **Writing a good interactive discussion guide based on every Sunday-morning sermon is time consuming.**
6. **Tracking attendance and participation is much harder when groups are in different locations as opposed**



A healthy church is built on community, which includes concentric and overlapping rings of interactive small-groups.

I know that is a bold statement, but I firmly believe it is true. These small groups go by various names and have various purposes. Some are called "Sunday school" while others are called "ladies' Bible study" or "men's prayer breakfast" and even "choir." These are all examples of small groups. I do not believe that any church reproduces itself solely from the pulpit ministry alone, no matter how great that ministry is. The pulpit is greatly used by God, but the "one another" passages are practiced more outside of the Sunday morning worship/praching/teaching service.

Jesus, our role model for ministry, used small groups extensively. He had groups of three, twelve, seventy, and five hundred. He sent them out two-by-two for ministry. The early Church used this model in Acts as they went house-to-house to observe the Lord's Supper while teaching and preaching in those same homes.

Most educational authorities will say that twelve to twenty adults in an interactive small group is the ideal style and size for the best adult pedagogy. Unfortunately, most learning in churches consists of four one-way teaching sessions: most Sunday school classes are taught lecture style which is really not much different from the pulpit ministry on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night.

Obstacles and Objections

to the historical “all-in-one-room” Wednesday night service.

7. **Multiplying groups after they become larger and very close-knit can be difficult.**
8. **Multiplying leaders of character and quality can be very challenging.**
9. **Keeping the purpose and style of teaching and leading differences clear between Adult Bible Fellowship and Care Groups is difficult.**
10. **Allowing groups to disband when they need to without unnecessary drama can be difficult.**

There are answers to each of these challenges, but we should never think of this leap into a different style of learning and transference of values as something that will be easily accomplished. It is not and will not be.

What are the values of this system that we have experienced?

1. **We have found future pastors among our small-group lay leaders.** A man’s ability to develop leaders or to lead people to theological truths in his small group could be a signal that this is a man God wants to set apart for His service. We have had that happen in our church.
2. **We find out what people are *not* learning or remembering from the sermon.** The most humbling experience for the senior pastor or teaching pastor is to sit in an interactive small group after he has spent hours studying and crafting his sermon notes *and* the small-group guide questions and finding out just seventy-two hours after the sermon that the people cannot answer a simple question about the point of the sermon or its application.
3. **We find that the small discussion groups create a deeper bond and caring for “one another” than our Sunday-school classes do.** As the senior pastor, I rarely get involved in a host of “care-for-one-another” type ministries. Our Care Groups handle those issues naturally among themselves.
4. **We find in the discussion format what newer believers do not know or what false teaching they have absorbed that we would never have otherwise known.** It is fascinating that, when given a chance to speak in a place of friends, both younger and older believers will ask questions or make comments that reveal their need for growth or for a better understanding of Scripture.
5. **We find more lay people studying and listening to the sermon, even downloading it when they could**
6. **We find more people taking careful notes on Sundays and taking those bulletins to their Care Groups so they can take part in the discussion.** I have walked into church members’ homes and have seen the bulletin with a filled-in outline attached to the refrigerator door.
7. **We find more people meditating on the sermon through the week.**
8. **We find more openness to accountability to the group and individual leaders because of the transparency that develops over time in a group.**
9. **We find our corporate prayer time being extended both in the meetings and then outside the meetings as each group takes on personal responsibility for prayer requests within their group.**
10. **We find a larger church becoming “smaller” and more relational to those who regularly attend the Care Groups because they truly gain real friends as they share life and obey naturally the “one another” commands in Scripture.**

Is this organizational training and discipleship structure that Tri-City practices mandatory in Scripture? Absolutely not! However, a study of the “one another” Scripture passages reveals both commands and examples regarding this small group structure. It is apparent that many modern independent Baptist churches are not purposefully organizing themselves to fulfill these biblical practices in a natural setting. Where do we naturally “confess our faults one to another”? Where do we naturally “pray for one another”? Where do we naturally “admonish one another”? How do these and many other “one another” passages happen organically without an extensive, purposeful organizational structure? These passages were fulfilled as part of the normal life structure in the New Testament-era local church that met in homes.

My observation is that, after twenty years of structuring our church along these lines, the benefits outweigh the difficulties. It is never easy to encourage change in people who have been trained to sit and not talk or to simply use church as a social club. They need to develop into Christian leaders who share their faith with believers and unbelievers alike. This Care Group interactive discussion, based on the Sunday-morning message, seems to be a positive step forward in changing the status quo into something fundamentally New Testament.

Dr. Michael D. Sproul is the senior pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church and chairman of the Board of International Baptist College and Seminary and Tri-City Christian Academy as well as the president of International Baptist Missions. He and his wife, Elma, have two married children.



Lessons Learned from Small-

Lesson 1: It is critically important for small groups to be gospel-centered and connected to salvation in Christ.

It was the fall of 1979, my junior year at a secular college, when, while jogging, I ran across an avid marathon runner. She was being trained by well-known New Zealander, Arthur Lydiard, to race competitively at an international level. She shared with me how the Bible spoke about running and that as a baseball player and athlete I might benefit by attending a small-group Bible study. She then proceeded to invite me to such a study off campus.

This would be the first small-group Bible study I would attend. I was a party monster known as “Sick Will,” twenty-one, and unsaved. The average age of those attending the small group was somewhere over sixty; the teacher was grandmotherly and very Pennsylvania Dutch. She wore a hat the size of a large sombrero that had a cornucopia of flowers and maybe vegetables wrapped around the brim. (I waited the whole night to see whether a finch or sparrow would journey out from her crowning arboretum.) But what really stood out about Mrs. Luella Keener was her pleasant smile and peaceful demeanor. She held in her hands a book with a black leather cover and large print. At this time I did not own a Bible, so I respectfully listened as she talked about dispensationalism, the Rapture, the Antichrist, Revelation, the Millennium, and a list of other words that I had never heard before. It appeared that these concepts were being generated from the book in her hand. I could see in her Bible that she had underlined verses and had written copious notes in the margins. I wasn’t sure if that were sacrilegious or not, but I was intrigued with the topic: prophecy.

In her presentation she explained how a person could become a Christian by repenting and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. After the study I talked with her privately on a whole range of topics from dinosaurs to UFOs, but what I was most interested in was how she could say with confidence that a person could know that he has eternal life. Several weeks later, because of attending this small group, I called on the Lord Jesus Christ to save me.

Lesson 2: Small groups must be led by godly, mature leaders and connected primarily to the Scriptures.

Immediately after my conversion I wanted to start my own small-group Bible study in my dorm room on Brinser 2-South. I would lead the study along with Hound Dog Mac, our third-baseman who had just trusted Christ. We called it the LUV Bible Study, with no one being able to enter our L-shaped room without first hugging three people (usually of the opposite gender). We would then sing “Kumbaya” thirty or forty times. Then our “in-depth study” consisted of pooling our ignorance and discussing the appropriateness of going to our old haunts to witness to our friends—all while sipping on a Coke. We debated about speaking in tongues,

losing one’s salvation, the age of the Earth, and the end times. I had not yet read all of the New Testament, but I was working on it. I had purchased two (nearly inspired, as far as I was concerned) books to start my theological library. One was called *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and the other was something about evidences of the Christian faith. With these tools, lots of zeal, and my incredible knowledge of the Scripture (!), I was able to offend most of the group on a weekly basis. I noticed that my hug count was diminishing through the semester, but thankfully, because this was the LUV Study, students still packed the room every week.

Lesson 3: Small groups must be connected to the local church—otherwise they risk becoming deviant in their theology.

During that same semester I began to attend a fundamental church in town where Mrs. Keener attended. She wanted me to be discipled by her husband and to hear the excellent messages preached by Pastor Smith. At first I was not sure that I needed to go to church on Sunday, since our small group in the dorm was somewhat like a church service—only more fun and without “the-only-thing-they-want: offering.” It was a real stretch for me to get up on Sundays before noon, but I managed to and actually began attending the morning service. The pastor preached from the Bible, a novel idea. I was learning new hymns each week. One really resonated with me—it was called “Amazing Grace.” The people were so friendly—nearly every Sunday I was invited home with a family for dinner.



Group Bible Studies

I was also challenged to be baptized by immersion. I thought that strange and redundant since I had already been baptized as a baby. The pastor invited me to a small-group study on the topic of baptism. After four weeks I was convinced I needed to be baptized by immersion. I called my mom to see if she would come and attend that service. She said I was already baptized and that it sounded like I was in a cult. I defended my new church and their position on baptism. That did not go well. I loved my biological family, but now God was giving me a new spiritual family, called the church.

Lesson 4: Disciple-making must be at the heart of small-group studies. Small groups must be connected to God's love for the believer and for the lost.

After several months attending just the morning service, the college-career pastor invited me to a small-group Bible study called Sunday school (a.k.a. adult Bible fellowship, or ABF). He said I would love it and that I would get to meet people my age who loved the Lord. This would require me to wake up even earlier on Sunday, but out of deference to Pastor Carter and his personal invitation I began to attend. Immediately I felt like a fish out of water. When the class was asked to find a Bible reference they would readily find it while I fumbled to figure out which Testament to look in first. They prayed in King James English, and the guys wore suits and ties and the girls wore dresses. I didn't own a tie, and if I had it would have to be a snap-on. Each seemed to have

some special affinity with a Christian college, names I had never heard of. The only Christian colleges I knew were Notre Dame and Brigham Young. I felt like an outsider, and, at the fellowships, like the invisible man. The one thing about the group that intrigued me was that there was very little interest in evangelism. This discouraged me, and I mentioned it to the college/career pastor that this small group was not for me.

Lesson 5: Christ set the example of small-group ministry.

The Lord Jesus was the Master of the small group, which provided His followers a greater reception of Him. The Gospels illustrate how Christ used a small group, the Twelve, to turn the world upside-down. It was the ideal size for teaching, relational interaction, and for the practical application of truth in the field. The small group also allowed the Lord to take aside three of the men to provide a greater revelation of Himself in advanced leadership-training settings. Inside the Lord's small group, it appears that they would pair off for accountability and for a greater resolve to serve Him. This pairing would extend to the Seventy, who were sent out by twos to provide a greater representation and witness for Him. Just before Pentecost, the 120 waited for the Holy Spirit to empower them. This Bible study and prayer meeting provided a greater reciprocity with Him. After the resurrection, the five hundred worshipped the risen Lord and demonstrated a greater reverence to Him.

Our discipleship model needs to follow the Lord's example at each level (one on one, the twelve, the three, the seventy, the two, the one-hundred and twenty, and the five hundred). The training of the twelve serves as our template for the small-group study. Our small groups begin with advanced leadership training with the group leaders. From this Bible study, applicational, discussion questions are developed for the leaders to use in their small groups.

The methodology for our small groups is found in the acronym POWER. The "P" stands for prayer; "O" stands for openness; "W" stands for the Word; "E" stands for encouraging the believers; and "R" stands for our responsibility to the lost. Each small-group meeting will include those five components, with the focus being love for God and "LUV" for others! If you are interested in more details on the theology and practice of small groups, please feel to email me at wsenn@tricitybaptist.org.

I LUV small groups!

Dr. William J. Senn III is the senior pastor at Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado, and the former senior pastor of University Baptist Church in Clemson, South Carolina. He is the founder and president of Cross Impact Campus Ministries.



Church Planting with Small Groups

Is it really possible to plant a growing, God-honoring church in an increasingly heathen culture that aggressively opposes and even despises God and His truth? Before answering that question, let us consider the two descriptions of this church. First it needs to be growing, because a church that is not, at some rate, reaching new people, is in the process of dying.

Second, it needs to be God-honoring, because it is certainly possible to grow a church in ways that don't honor God. God-honoring growth is God-authored growth. A truly growing church is one in which God is at work adding newly saved people who were previously lost in sin (Acts 2:47).

What Does a God-Honoring Church Look Like?

But, humanly speaking, how does a growing, God-honoring church reach lost people in a heathen culture? Does it seek to attract them by becoming like them? While that may be a possible option, it's not a God-honoring one. Writing under divine inspiration, the apostle John records the High Priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which He clearly and powerfully states that we need to be in the

world without being of the world (John 17:14–19). In his first epistle, John later warns believers not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17). Clearly, God does not instruct individual believers to demonstrate their love for the lost by becoming like them.

In his epistles, the apostle Paul makes similar statements regarding the assembly of believers in a local church. God intends for a local church to be a place in which His called and gifted leaders mature the church body in Christlikeness, so that the members of that body are equipped to do the work of the ministry and to edify one another (Eph. 4:11–16). The environment of a God-honoring local church is clearly an other-worldly one! That's as it should be, since believers really have no common ground on which to unite with unbelievers (2 Cor. 2:14–17). Thus, unbelievers who enter a gathered assembly of believers should not feel comfortable—but convicted (1 Cor. 14:24).

Believers in such an assembly need to be trained to go out and reach unbelievers rather than to invite unbelievers in. Jesus and the apostles modeled aggressive evangelism in the New Testament, but they consistently practiced that evangelism outside the environment of a gathered assembly of believers. There simply isn't a single passage of Scripture that instructs God's people to create a church environment that is attractive

or comfortable to those who are not God's people and then invite the lost into that environment. Whatever method we use to plant and grow a church, it should not be this one!

Small-Group Bible Study

But what if we sought to reach the lost outside the assembled local church in an environment that actually helped to bridge the ever-widening gap between the lost world and the God-honoring church? Does such an environment actually exist? Yes it does, and I used it to effectively plant a church that sought to grow in God-honoring ways. That environment is the small-group home Bible study. It is not called a church, nor does it replace the church. However, it can be a very effective tool for birthing and building churches. In fact, the history of some of today's strongest churches bears out the fact that they began as home Bible studies.

For one thing, a home Bible study environment draws certain lost people to Christ who would never even think about coming to a church service. Years ago, I was asked by a church member to visit her Jewish mother in the hospital. The mother, who was facing very risky surgery, agreed to the visit as long as the name "Jesus" was not mentioned, even in prayer. Following repeated visits during her recovery period, the mother started to attend a small-group Bible study that was being conducted in her daughter's home. She consistently attended many such studies until she reached the point that she was bringing a Bible, openly asking questions, and participating in discussions. Through e-mail correspondence outside of the studies, it became increasingly obvious that this Jewish woman was recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. Although her physical challenges eventually took her life, before she passed into eternity she had reached a point where she attended some church services and even joined in the singing of hymns. Her brother, a born-again believer who sang "The Lord's Prayer" at her funeral, told me that she had placed her personal faith in Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

Another example comes readily to mind. A congregation member brought his neighbor to a small-group Bible study in the home of another church member. The invited neighbor was clearly not a believer and even expressed open disagreement to the scriptural teaching that took place in the study. On the way home, the discussion even became a little heated as the lost man expressed even stronger opposition to the things he had heard at the Bible study. Nevertheless, he continued to attend. After a while, he even started coming to church services. One Sunday morning, he was gloriously saved! Sure enough, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

From the very moment he was saved, this man never again opposed any teaching from Scripture. He continued to attend home Bible studies and entered discussions in a way that demonstrated his thorough belief in and commitment to the truth of Scripture. He was indeed a believer! He faithfully committed himself to church attendance and eventually used his gifts to serve in leadership as well.

That man's continued attendance brings up another value of home Bible

studies: they provide a very effective environment for the discipleship of believers. The task of planting churches does not end with the salvation of souls; that's merely where it begins. The job of the church is to make disciples of Christ and teach them to observe all that He commanded (Matt. 28:18-20).

A man who had come to Christ through the testimony of his believing wife went into a spiritual tailspin after he had divorced her due to her repeated infidelity. Following a move into the area, he attended a Sunday school class, after which I visited him in his home. The man explained how he had been away from the Lord for so many years that he was no longer sure if he even knew the Lord. As a result, he was too reluctant to come to a full church service. I encouraged him to attend a small-group Bible study that was meeting in a church member's home. The man agreed to come and never stopped coming! Over time, his heart softened to the things of God. He became sure of his relationship with the Lord and also desired deeper relationships with other believers. Before long, he was faithfully attending every church service and began to use his gifts in service to the Lord. Though no longer living in the same area, he's still an active member in a Bible-believing church.

Another example comes to mind. A married couple called me on the phone. They had been attending a very liberal church that openly supported abortion and homosexuality. However, they were believers and received most of their biblical instruction from well-known evangelical pastors they listened to on the radio. This led them to understand that they needed to be part of a Bible-believing church themselves. When they called me on the phone, they asked many pointed questions. They later explained that they were thrilled by the fact that each question was answered from Scripture. Before long, they were not only faithfully attending church but also hosting a Bible study in their home. They became some of the most rapidly growing disciples I ever met.

In my eighteen years of pastoral ministry, I never used a tool that was more effective in reaching the lost and discipling believers than small-group home Bible studies. The believers who faithfully attended these studies became very grounded in their faith and grew in their love for the Lord and one another. Moreover, they did not use the home Bible studies as a replacement for church attendance. Public preaching and teaching of God's Word are necessary and biblical, and these believers understood that. Home Bible studies offer opportunities for relationships to be formed, questions to be asked, answers to be offered, and bridges to be built.

If you want to plant and grow a God-honoring church in a heathen culture while keeping the church separated from that culture, consider small-group home Bible studies. My experience tells me they work!

**I never used a
tool that was
more effective in
reaching the lost . . .**

Kevin Callahan holds two earned degrees from Bob Jones University and an honorary doctorate from South India Baptist Bible College and Seminary. He planted Grace Bible Church in New Freedom, Pennsylvania, which he pastored for eighteen years. For the past twelve years he has served as president of International Partnership Ministries, which concentrates on partnering with foreign nationals.

Creating Community in the Military Chapel



Through an amazing set of circumstances, in 1991 God abruptly changed the plan I had for my life of ministry. That summer I raised my hand and swore an oath to uphold the Constitution and defend our land against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

I was a direct commission officer. That means that unlike almost every other chaplain, I stepped on Beale Air Force Base in July of 1991 never having attended an officer's school, a chaplain's course, or even spent any time in the Guard or Reserves. I was twenty-seven with two small children and a very gracious wife. I did not know how to salute, march, or even how to put on a uniform, but on the first day I was a First Lieutenant, which meant that about eighty percent of the base saluted me, even though I did not know how to salute them back!

I have now served twenty-seven-and-a-half years. Five of those years were on active duty. Over twenty-two of those years have been in the Reserves or Guard. I have deployed three times to war zones and have had about thirty to thirty-five TDYs (temporary duty assignments) away from home. I currently hold the rank of colonel and am the Arizona National Guard state chaplain, leading twenty-five chaplains and chaplain candidates and twenty-four religious-affairs specialists.

Analysis and a Plan

Back in 1991, I was handed a small African-American congregation of fifteen to twenty in a dilapidated World-War-II chapel on the main base ten miles from housing, but right across the street from the single airmen's barracks. While there I analyzed the needs that I saw in the military. Within nine months of that appointment, I deployed to Saudi Arabia. But I returned home with a plan.

The Air Force, then and now, has a young demographic. The majority of airmen are under the age of twenty-nine. This age group, in every generation, is always less inclined

to faithful worship attendance or to pursuing a relationship with God.

This age group is also very mobile. My son is an Air Force Academy graduate and a KC-135 pilot. At his first base, he deployed five times, and his average time spent away from base was about two hundred days per year. The deployment rate then and now as well as the temporary duty assignments (including required schooling) often leave one parent alone half the year or more. Plus, most families move every three years.

It is also ethnically diverse. I say the military is a "Mayberry" in its small-town feel but a major urban center in its diversity. The diversity of the military reflects the diversity of America but scattered all over the world on small bases.

This group often comes from very broken and emotionally crippled environments with the vast majority coming from fractured homes or no home at all. They simply do not know what a real community looks like. In the five years I was on active duty, my wife estimates that we fed five hundred different airmen in our home. Of those, we counted only five whose biological parents were still happily married. I wrote a journal article entitled "The Cinderella and Sleepless in Seattle Syndrome" to describe this generation of young airmen and the challenges they face and solutions for them to build relationships within the church and with each other.

Since the New Testament describes the church as the "body of Christ," think about the body of Christians and non-Christians that I had inherited to pastor: they were less inclined to worship, more inclined to be gone, lacking good family role models, and hesitant to worship together because of cultural differences even if they were on base together on any given Sunday.

The Need for Community

I knew this body of Christ would solidify only if we built community. I define Christian community as "individuals

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First Partaker

Spiritual Solitude

Solitude is a separation from all men for a period of time in order to be enabled to express one's self more earnestly and freely as one engages himself in seeking after God (Wilhelmus à Brakel, The Christian's Reasonable Service, IV, 19).

Last issue's column commended the spiritual practice of Christian retirement. Christian retirement isn't just a daily devotional time. It's a season of solitude. Its purpose is to disengage from the world in order to meet with God undistractedly and to reflect deeply upon the present state of our relationship with Him.

Throughout over forty years of reading about the lives of ministers and missionaries of past centuries, I've been struck time after time after time with certain sharp contrasts between their philosophy of ministry and that which has predominated throughout the last century or so. Some of these differences are so conspicuous that one wonders whether our spiritual forefathers would even acknowledge us to be faithful ministers.

One of these contrasts is in this dimension of decidedly setting time apart not only from the world but even from the ministry itself in order to nurture one's own spiritual mindedness. In scriptural terms, this falls underneath the heading of taking heed to oneself (1 Tim. 4:16). This priority was maintained doggedly by ministers in the past (not all of them, to be sure, but certainly those whose walk with God continues to inspire). For instance, the nineteenth-century missionary to India Henry Martyn, whose life and diaries continue to disciple generations of Christians, confessed to this conviction uncompromisingly.

Thanks are due to the Lord for showing me . . . how much my heart has been neglected of late. I see by this how great are the temptations of a Missionary to neglect his own soul. Apparently outwardly employed for God, my heart has been growing more hard and proud. Let me be taught that the first great business on earth is the sanctification of my own soul; so shall I be rendered more capable also of performing the duties of the ministry . . . in a holy and solemn manner (*Journal*, April 24, 1807).

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

In another journal entry he chides himself again for drifting back into prioritizing the work of the ministry over the nurture of his own soul.

Spent more time than usual in the evening at prayer, and had awful convictions of the general deadness of my heart in divine things; may the Lord in mercy to my soul save me from setting up an idol of any sort in his room, as I do by preferring a work professedly for him to communion with him. How obstinate the reluctance of the natural heart to God. But O my soul, be not deceived, the chief work on earth is to obtain sanctification, and to walk with God (June 1807).

Similar references sprinkle the personal journals and works on pastoral theology of ministers of the past. Some of these entries speak of extended spiritual solitude specifically. I want to quote numerous examples of these, not so much in order to confirm that there is this conspicuous difference between these ministers of the past and ourselves—between their philosophy of ministry and our own—but for the sake of displaying the specifics of what it was that they were seeking from spiritual retirement. As you read, you might find it profitable to take a pencil and mark the various objectives that they had in view, or the actual benefits for which they were grateful.

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Cotton Mather (1663–1728)

The early American minister Cotton Mather included several pages on this subject in his seminal Puritan work on the ministry, *Student and Preacher* (1726). His counsel is so seldom heard today that I want to quote a substantial part of it.

But what in a very particular manner I advise you to, is, now and then to set apart whole days for interviews with heaven; and this with such fasting as you may find you are able to bear, and may be for the help of your devotions. On such days, go through a process of repentance, which cannot be too often repeated. Renew your flights to the Saviour, that you may be more quickened in the life of God. Present the sacrifices wherein you shall offer up your all unto him, and embrace and enjoy Christ instead of all. Carry to him all your concerns; and let all your desire be before him, and none of your groaning be hid from him. . . .

Soar up as high as you can towards union with God. Intermix all along, the reading of proper things, wherein God from the holy oracle may commune with you; and you may assist and inflame the work wherein you are engaged. Let the minutes of spaces between your devotions, be filled with reflections, that may have a tendency to bring you into abasements of yourself or into adorations of your God; and from your heart within you, let them go up silently unto the Lord. Conclude all with holy projections and purposes, for further improvements in a careful, fruitful, humble walk with God.

But how much could I wish, that in this religion of the closet, you may know what it is to keep days of thanksgiving too? Such days you may fill with contemplations on the perfections of the infinite God, and the glories of your Almighty Redeemer, and the wondrous things which he has done; and the ministry of his angels; and with enumerations of the favours, which both on spiritual, and on temporal accounts you have received from him; whereof you should make explicit acknowledgements unto your powerful and merciful benefactor, and particularly see and own how undeserved they have been, and how distinguishing they have been, and how the contrary sufferings of Christ have purchased them.

And what will be the blessed benefits of such days? Mather writes,

These days will not only obtain marvelous blessings for you, but also leave a celestial flavor and grandeur on your mind, and infuse a becoming discretion and gravity into all your conversation. One consequent of these things will be, what I am very solicitous that you should arrive unto, that is to say, an ability to express yourself in prayer to the glorious God, and spread the cases of the people before him on all occasions: an ability without which, I shall not judge you qualified for an ordination to the pastoral care

of a flock, among the churches of God: but worthy to have an ANAXIOS [unworthy, unfit] cried out upon you (117–19).¹

Mather's own *Journal* includes records of his keeping such days himself. These two examples are representative of many such entries.

May 25, 1685. This Day I sett apart for secret Thanksgivings unto God. I spent the Day, most of it, retired in our Meeting-house; Meditating on the Lord's various Mercies to mee, and mentioning of those Mercies on my Knees before Him; and singing Psalms agreeable. Moreover, in the Beginning of the Day I took singular Pains to celebrate and magnify the Lord, for those Things wherein I am not so nearly concerned, as particular Favours to myself; namely, His Attributes, and Perfections, and His wondrous Works in Creation and Providence.

August 20, 1697. This Day I sett apart, for the Exercises of a secret THANKSGIVING before the Lord. In the former Part of the Day, when I was on my Knees confessing the Glories of God, in my Lord JESUS CHRIST, after I had requested and obtained the Irradiations of His Holy Spirit for that Service, I received an Heart-melting Assurance from the Lord, that inasmuch as my Heart was become desirous to Praise Him, Hee would never send mee down to that miserable World, where they do not praise, but hate Him, and curse Him, and blaspheme Him forever: No, but Hee would grant mee a State of eternal Blessedness, wherein I shall carry on the blessed Work of praising Him, which I was now beginning to do. An Heavenly Disposition of Soul this Day came upon mee, in many Exercises of the Day.

Charles Bridges (1794–1869)

Another convincing admonition to make use of seasons of solitude comes from Charles Bridges, in his classic work for preachers, *The Christian Ministry*. You may be familiar with this title and be aware of the fact that he subtitled it, *With an Inquiry into the Causes of Its Inefficiency*. Though it might not occur to contemporary writers on pastoral theology to do so, Bridges includes among those “causes” of ministerial inefficiency an entire chapter on “Neglect of Retirement.” He begins,

In the midst of the incessant, pressing, and active avocations of the Christian Ministry, how seasonable is the considerate advice of our gracious Master—“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile” (Mk. 6:31). The spirit of prayer cannot breathe freely in the atmosphere of constant and exciting employment. Not that we would seek retirement, like the contemplative monk, for the purposes of abstraction; but to recruit

our spiritual energies for renewed exercises of self-denial and perseverance.

Toward the conclusion of the chapter Bridges warns against neglecting such time alone with the Lord for any reason, including even the desirability of fellowship with other Christians.

The Writer would . . . wish to draw his own mind and his brethren habitually to this recollection, that nothing will enrich or console us in the neglect of intimate communion with God. We must “walk with God” at any rate, or our souls will die. Even Christian communion will form an empty substitute for this hallowed intercourse. The command is—“Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door.” Shut out not only vanity and the world, but even for a time “the communion of Saints.” The soul may lose its spiritual vigor in any company but that of God—in the best as well as in the worst—in the Church, as well as in the world—in the active engagements of the Ministry, as well as in secular employments.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92)

Charles Haddon Spurgeon also felt strongly about this matter. In *Lectures to My Students* his chapter on “The Preacher’s Private Prayer” concludes with a lengthy paragraph of counsel that encourages not just days, but whole weeks or months for spiritual nurture.

I would seriously recommend to you, when settled in the ministry, the celebration of extraordinary seasons of devotion. If your ordinary prayers do not keep up the freshness and vigor of your souls, and you feel that you are flagging, get alone for a week, or even a month if possible. We have occasional holidays, why not frequent holy days? . . . Isaac Ambrose, once pastor of Preston, who wrote that famous book, *Looking unto Jesus*, always set apart one month in the year for seclusion in a hut in a wood at Garstang. No wonder that he was so mighty a divine, when he could regularly spend so long a time in the mount with God. . . .

Even if our public work were laid aside to give us space for special prayer, it might be a great gain to our churches. A voyage to the golden rivers of fellowship and meditation would be well repaid by a freight of sanctified feeling and elevated thought. Our silence might be better than our voices if our solitude were spent with God.

How do we feel about such counsel? Is it familiar to us? Do we long to hear it preached at our conferences for ministers? Do we urge it upon one another in our fellowships? Or is it foreign? A new thought? Even startling? At the risk of sounding critical, which I certainly have no desire to be, I nevertheless have to say that I can’t remember ever hearing someone preach these things. They just don’t seem to be included in our phi-

losophy of ministry, though it’s apparent that they were commonly understood even just a few generations ago. To clinch this, let me include entries from the personal reflections of four more men whose ministries are held universally in high esteem.

Richard Baxter (1615–91)

It would be hard to think of anyone busier about the Lord’s work than Richard Baxter. His writings were voluminous. One alone, *The Christian Directory*, contains over a million and a quarter words! Anyone who has read his *Reformed Pastor* has been staggered, if not completely overwhelmed, by the industrious scheme of systematic pastoral work that he carried out at Kidderminster. Yet Baxter believed strongly in the necessity of ministerial retirement. In a work titled *The Christian’s Converse with God* (Part III of *The Divine Life*) he includes occasional personal reminiscences. One is a kind of instructive lament.

At the risk of sounding critical, which I certainly have no desire to be, I nevertheless have to say that I can’t remember ever hearing someone preach these things. They just don’t seem to be included in our philosophy of ministry, though it’s apparent that they were commonly understood even just a few generations ago.

Many a time I have repented that ever I spent so much time with man, and wished I had never seen the faces of some that are eminent in the world, whose favour and converse others are ambitious of; but it is my grief and shame that so small a part of all my life hath been spent with God, and that fervent prayer and heavenly contemplations have been so seldom and so short. Oh that I had lived more with God, though I had been less with the dearest of my friends! How much more sweet then would my life have been! How much more blameless, regular, and pure! How much more fruitful and answerable to my obligations and professions! How much more comfortable to my review! How many falls, and hurts, and wounds, and griefs, and groans might I have escaped! Oh how much more pleasing is it now to my remembrance to think of the hours in which I have lain at the feet of God, though it were in tears and groans, than to think of the time which I have spent in any common converse with the greatest, or the learnedest, or the dearest of my acquaintance.

Andrew Bonar (1810–92)

Andrew Bonar makes so many entries to seeking spiritual solitude for the sake of spiritual reflection that, if gathered together, they would probably amount to a small book. I'll give samples.

On the eleventh anniversary of his ordination (Sept. 20, 1849), he writes that he *spent some hours in the afternoon in the wood, reviewing the past, confessing sin, seeking mercy through the blood of the Lamb, who has a fold of righteousness to spread over a minister's sins.*

Two years later he writes, *In prayer in the wood for some time, having set apart three hours for devotion; felt drawn out to pray; felt drawn out much to pray for that peculiar fragrance which believers have about them, who are very much in fellowship with God* (Sept. 16, 1851).

On another occasion he reminisced about both the opposition and the blessing of such times.

Yesterday got a day to myself for prayer. With me every time of prayer, or almost every time, begins with a conflict, and often it is when I have been long done and am at my usual study that the tide seems to set in by way of an answer, or earnest of an answer. For I scarcely ever have set apart special times for prayer and waiting upon the Lord without getting some such token of acceptance soon (March 1, 1856).

Toward the conclusion of his thirty-eighth year in the ministry (September 9, 1876) he recorded, *I got last Saturday set apart as a day of prayer; and I trace much of my help to that day. I hope this winter to get such a day of prayer and fasting once a month.*

Henry Martyn (1781–1812)

Henry Martyn's missionary journals testify similarly to an earnest pursuit of spirituality through seasons of solitude.

I felt the need of setting apart a day for the restoration of my soul by solemn prayer. My views of eternity are become dim and transient. . . . I sought to pause, and to consider what I wanted, and to look up with fear and faith, and I found the benefit; for my soul was soon composed to that devout sobriety, which I knew, by its sweetness, to be its proper frame. I was engaged in prayer in the manner I like—**deep seriousness**; at the end of it, I felt great fear of forgetting the presence of God, and of leaving Him as soon as I should leave the posture of devotion.

. . . This day was set apart for fasting and prayer; the morning was spent in the work of humiliation, and through mercy there was no great difficulty. The hard heart was broken, and contrite in a certain degree. At least I had not the distressing sensation of impudent hard-heartedness which I sometimes feel at the sight of sin (March 5, 1806).²

Edard D. Griffin (1770–1837)

Edward D. Griffin, whose life and sermons literally *breathe* devotion to Christ, wrote of the practice of solitude with deep spiritual insight.

June 25, 1804, A day for special devotion. I am now convinced that the occasion of my being unable to realize divine things, of the loss of the serenity and self-enjoyment which I formerly possessed, of the restlessness that cannot find a home,—of an incapacity to resist the distracting influence of the world, and to bear up calmly against its frowns,—is the neglect of my closet, and the discontinuance of days of special devotion. It is impossible for the soul to retain a realizing and soothing sense of eternal things, unless that sense is renewed and deeply impressed in secret meditation and devotion. The mind, unless settled in this way, will be too much distracted in public devotion, and in religious conversation, to obtain this sense, to such a degree as will fortify and support it. All my restless and irregular feelings are imputable, in a great measure, to this cause. The only cure must be sought in the renewal of secret devotion, and in days of special prayer and meditation. What contentment, submission, composure, and peace, would this enable me to carry into all the scenes of duty and care.³

A more retired state of reflection I am convinced is necessary, not only to devotion, to domestic and self-enjoyment, but to furnish me with such views and impressions of divine truth as will give interest to my public ministrations, sanctity to my character, and savoriness to my conversation among my people.⁴

A Final Observation

There have always been ministers whose defect is laziness. Often they have trouble even recognizing it because they seem to themselves to be entirely busy day and night. But in truth, what they've developed is what Al Martin decried as *the unholy art of "puttering."* He described it as *the ability to be occupied with non-essential trivialities in such a way as to deceive ourselves and our people into thinking that we are busy about the work of God's kingdom.*⁵

Undoubtedly *puttering* is the habit of some and a temptation to all. But the opposite defect, which this article is exposing, may be more common. May the Lord awaken us to the danger, lest we find ourselves deeply regretful: *They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept* (Song of Solomon 1:6). ☞

¹ The original title of Mather's work was *Manductio ad Ministerium; or The ANGELS preparing to sound the TRUMPETS*.

² *The Life and Letters of Henry Martyn*, John Sargent, 57.

³ *The Life and Sermons of Edward D. Griffin*, I, 84.

⁴ *Ibid*, 85.

⁵ *What's Wrong with Preaching Today?*, 16.

Bring . . . the Books

A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

It's far too easy to get in a rut in our own personal walk with the Lord. When this happens, sometimes it is wise to set aside whatever it is you read just to "keep up with what's going on" and pick up a volume that will shake you up by zeroing in on your own personal relationship with God. If the book is concisely written, imminently readable, and cuts to the issue like a surgeon's scalpel, all the better. If the book is a bit older and established as a spiritual classic among God's choice servants, you can scarcely go wrong.

A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God* is precisely that kind of book.

Drafted in one sitting on a long train ride from Chicago to Texas in 1945, *The Pursuit of God* has blessed and challenged believers ever since. And no wonder. This book calls attention to some of the most important realities a Christian can ever experience. God is real. He is a Person. And He longs for me to experience a personal, vital relationship with Him.

At the recommendation of a good friend, I finally read this classic over the Christmas holidays and found it riveting, challenging, convicting, and refreshing, all at once. Of course, there were spots where an emphasis surfaced that I was uncertain of. But the weight of the book as a whole—along with many, many of the individual paragraphs and sentences—was profoundly impactful for good in my spiritual life. Perhaps the best way to try to persuade you to read (or reread) it is to offer sample quotations right down through each chapter of the book.

"Following Hard after God"—"The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him; and all the time we are pursuing Him we are already in His hand." "The continued and unembarrassed interchange of love and thought between God and the soul of the redeemed man is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion."

"The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing"—"Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival."

"Removing the Veil"—"I am bold to name the threads out of which this inner veil is woven. It is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we are, and therein lies both their subtlety and their power. To be specific, the self-sins are these: self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love and a host of others

like them. They dwell too deep within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of God is focused upon them."

"Apprehending God"—"A loving personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation." "A spiritual kingdom lies all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God Himself is here waiting our response to His Presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality."

"The Universal Presence"—"The Universal Presence is a fact. God is here. The whole universe is alive with His life. And He is no strange or foreign God, but the familiar Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose love has for these thousands of years enfolded the sinful race of men. And always He is trying to get our attention, to reveal Himself to us, to communicate with us."


"The Speaking Voice"—"I think a new world will arise out of the religious mists when we approach our Bible with the idea that it is not only a book which was once spoken, but a book which is now speaking."

"The Gaze of the Soul"—"Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God."

"Restoring the Creator-Creature Relation"—"God being Who and What He is and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is one of full lordship on His part and complete submission on ours."

"Meekness and Rest"—"Artificiality is one curse that will drop away the moment we kneel at Jesus' feet and surrender ourselves to His meekness. Then we will not care what people think of us so long as God is pleased."

"The Sacrament of Living"—"One of the greatest hindrances to internal peace which the Christian encounters is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas, the sacred and the secular."

God is real. He is a Person. He longs for me to experience a personal, vital relationship with Him. This book offers a powerful reminder of these truths and a deeply convicting (and inviting) challenge to live in light of them. Take up, read! 

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

Dr. Timothy Hughes is an adjunct faculty member and senior manager of the Office of Ministerial Advancement at Bob Jones University and BJU Seminary; he blogs at NTMinistry.com.

Straight Cuts

"Thou Hast Said"—Equivocation or Affirmation? (Matt. 26:63–64)

But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Who hasn't read these verses in the King James Version, especially in one's earlier years as a Christian, and wondered whether Jesus was equivocating when He responded to the high priest's question with the words "thou hast said" (v. 64)? Why, we wonder, didn't Jesus just come right out and make a clear affirmation of His identity as Messiah? The answer is that He did. Three simple principles of Bible study will clear this up for us—as well as reinforce their value as we read and study the Bible.

First, we all know that Scripture is its own best interpreter. Earlier in the chapter, speaking to the disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus indicates that one of them would betray Him. "Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said" (v. 25). Here Jesus gives the same response to Judas that He does to the high priest in v. 64 (*su eipas*). What's instructive, of course, is that no one wonders here whether or not Jesus is equivocating. Everyone accepts that Jesus gives a clear affirmation that Judas is the one He has in mind. The English poet and hymnwriter William Cowper struggled horribly through a life of doubt and depression. Yet in his classic hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," he tells of a lesson he sensed not just about providence, but also about Scripture: "**Judge not the Lord by feeble sense**, But trust Him for His grace. . . . Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain. **God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain**" (emphasis mine).

Second, we also know that context is a very important guide as we seek to interpret Scripture properly. Now, a couple of things pop up on the radar. First, note that the high priest, frustrated by Jesus' silence (vv. 62–63a) and obviously desiring to convict Jesus, places Him under oath. This is the force of "I adjure thee" (*exorkizo*, actually in itself an intensive form of the simple *horkizo*). We find a striking parallel in Genesis 24:3, where the Septuagint (the Greek version of the OT) uses the same verb. Is Jesus really going to let this one pass without a clear answer? Obviously not, and the rejoining charge of blasphemy by the high priest shows that he understood Jesus' "thou hast said" as a clear affirmation.

Next, note the parallel in Mark 14:62. Mark leaves us without any doubt as to what Jesus intended, framing His response as, "I am" (*ego eimi*).

Third, whether in school or from other seasoned Bible teachers, we are all taught the importance of the interpreting the Bible both historically and grammatically. This simply means that we must respect both the historical and grammatical meaning of the original language. Now a little study reveals that what we have in "thou hast said" (Matt. 26:25, 64) or "thou sayest" (Matt. 27:11) is something of an idiom. John Broadus brings this out in his classic work on Matthew. He paraphrases, "Thou hast said what is true," and then adds that Jesus' words are "a formula of affirmative answer found also in the Talmud" (*Matthew*, 549). The idiom is less clear in the English of today but perfectly clear in the language and day in which Jesus spoke. This explains the marginal readings we have in some Bibles on Matthew 26:64: "It is as you said," or the clearer translations in some modern language translations, "You have said it yourself" (NASV) or "Yes, it is as you say" (NIV). These versions are correct. They are not taking an interpretation so much as they are trying to put into modern parlance what they know is clear in the original.

The same goes for John's parallel to Matthew 27:1: "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37). The marginal reading for Matthew 27:11, is "It is as you say"; for John 18:37, it is "Thou sayest rightly." Pilate's response, "What is truth?," was one of sarcasm, not alarm. He understood that Jesus was clarifying His kingship, not denying it.

Jesus no more minced words with the high priest than He did with Judas or Pilate (26:25; 27:11). He was no equivocator when the right thing to do was to give a clear answer. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. He is the King. ☞

*"Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth"
(2 Tim. 2:15)*



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Dr. Tom Coleman was the senior pastor of the Calvary Independent Baptist Church for twenty-nine years and is currently preaching at the Berean Bible Fellowship in Unionville, Pennsylvania.

In his commentary on Ephesians 4:11, a popular writer states concerning the role of the evangelist, “Philip demonstrates that the evangelist is not a man with ten suits and ten sermons who runs a road show.” In reading the otherwise scholarly comments by this brother concerning the text, it struck me that while nothing sarcastic was written in his commentary concerning the apostles, the prophets, or pastor/teachers, he felt great liberty to take a swipe at a caricature of the evangelist. And he is not the only one doing so today!

In evangelical circles there is a tendency by too many to despise the ministry of the evangelist. Tragically, that same attitude has infected some in fundamentalism as well. In using the word “despise,” I refer to the biblical word thus translated, meaning “to think against or to disesteem.” I have personally heard pastors say that they would never have an itinerant evangelist in their church because “all they do is cause trouble.” Perhaps most of us have heard that the role of the evangelist is to “blow in, blow up, and blow out”—with good riddance.

What is the source of these despiteful attitudes toward a group of godly men who are seeking to fill a ministry need in the church? The purpose of this article is not to debate the nature of the biblical role of the evangelist, but to consider three areas which commonly foster despise of evangelists, seeking to point out that the same criticisms can at times be leveled against the office of the pastor.

Despising an Aberration

While we may not all agree on the job description of the New Testament evangelist, we must concur that an aberration of godly leadership is not pleasing or honoring to the Lord and must be rejected. Many of us have known of some in itinerant ministry who apparently felt they were above accountability and used their “ministry” for self-centered or unscriptural purposes. Is this aberration, however, a reason to despise the multitude of godly men who are serving sacrificially and effectively in itinerant work, greatly benefitting local churches across our nation? We must remember that there are at times local church pastors whose ministries are an aberration of the biblical requirements, but I trust we have not begun to despise the office of pastor. Let’s apply the same gracious standard to the evangelist.

Despising Arrogance

One successful author said he owed his success to a close study he had made of the rooster on his farm. That rooster was a powerful fighter; he could fly higher and cut deeper with his spurs than any other rooster in the barnyard. But he often lost fights against weaker

foes. His trouble was that right in the middle of a fight, he’d stop to crow.

While there no doubt are some men in evangelism who come across as arrogant, those that I have served with in our local church over the years have been just the opposite: they have been men of humility who have understood their role as that of strengthening the local church and its pastor. Perhaps you have known of some pastors who felt they were more than the “dictator”—they were the “only tator.” We must reject arrogance, whether it is evidenced in the life of the evangelist or in the life of the pastor. Those manifesting such attitudes are not models of a biblical office but rather models of proud flesh. Let’s hate the flesh, not the evangelist.

Despising Abuse

Years ago an evangelist was invited to minister to our congregation, but early in the week of meetings he preached a message that he knew contradicted the public corporate stand of our church. When I confronted him about the abuse of his rights as a guest in our pulpit, he said, “No one is going to tell me what to preach.” I simply stated to him that I would never desire to tell him what to preach, but that I would tell him where he would not preach—not in our pulpit again.

Such stories of abuse create problems for all evangelists. But do we not know of pastors who have abused their power in the local church? Again, let’s be consistent in our stand against the sin, but not despise all servants of God.

As a general rule, God’s people must be careful concerning criticism when the issue under consideration is merely a matter of disagreement and not a matter of doctrine or holy living.

There have been many who have criticized the methods of evangelists over the years in asking men and women to come to Christ by means of a public altar call. *The Reaper Magazine* told the story of a preacher who on one occasion took Evangelist D. L. Moody to task for his invitations. Moody listened to his objection and said, “I agree with you, brother. I don’t altogether like the method myself, and I am always looking for a better one. What is yours?” Considerately taken aback, the clergyman confessed he had no method, and did not invite men and women to make a public profession of their faith in the Savior. Moody decided he liked his obedience in inviting men to Christ more than he liked the other preacher’s disobedience.

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

Charles Spurgeon

Likewise the uniqueness of some personalities in evangelism has been a source of criticism. Billy Sunday, an unusual man who thundered against evil from the Gay Nineties through the Great Depression, preached Christ as the only answer to man's needs until his death in 1935. "I'm against sin," he said. "I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, and I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. When I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition." While some may not be comfortable with the personality and methods of such a servant of Christ, we must be careful to avoid unjust denigration of one who stands with Christ and for Him in an ungodly world. The Old Testament prophets were frequently unique in their dress and habits, but God called them and used them nonetheless.

Church history is filled with the benefit of itinerant evangelists to the work of God, with souls being saved and churches being strengthened. Names such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, R. A. Torrey, and Bob Jones Sr. bear testimony to the eternal effectiveness of their guild. Though they were men of diverse doctrinal positions and unique personalities, God used them and others like them greatly. And He is still doing the same today!

Paul sets a wonderful attitude standard for us in dealing with brethren who have differing gifts and ministries. In dealing with Apollos, the apostle was careful to commend and not criticize his brother who had been given a unique role in the church.

Aristotle once said, "Criticism is something we can avoid easily—by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." Someone rightly said that if criticism really had the power to harm, the skunk would be extinct by now. I am personally thankful that the criticism of evangelists has not caused many good men to cease functioning in a beneficial role to local churches. Let's be gracious and cease taking shots at those who bless us by their itinerant ministry.

As a closing thought, may we be challenged with the need of both personal and pulpit evangelism in these last days. Walter K. Price had some pertinent thoughts on the outreach of the gospel during the coming Tribulation period:

One hundred forty-four thousand Jews saved, plus a multitude which no man can number out of all the nations who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb! And all this within the limits of the tribulation period. What a revival! Neither Pentecost in the first century, nor the Reformation on the Continent, nor the evangelical revival in England,

nor the Great Awakening in the Colonies, could match this spiritual awakening. . . . The world is yet in store for its greatest spiritual revival in which vast multitudes beyond comprehension will be saved. This is a phase of the tribulation period that has been little noted. Such emphasis has been put upon the horror of the tribulation that we have lost sight of the fact that it will also be a time of unprecedented revival.

As we stand for the Word of God in the midst of the evils of our day, let's pray and labor for souls and revival. God is still able to give our nation and our world a great awakening. I would certainly recommend using a respected guest speaker to reinforce the message going forth from your pulpit. Whatever your thoughts may be on the gift of the evangelist, don't neglect the great work of evangelism in your own life and the life of your congregation!

Bud Steadman is executive director of Baptist World Mission.

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For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

—Jesus, Matthew 18:20

A spiritual minority can win over an unspiritual majority.

—Wayne Van Gelderen Sr.

Measure your growth in grace by your sensitiveness to sin.

—Oswald Chambers

Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.

—Edward Abby

All growth that is not toward God is growing to decay.

—George MacDonald

Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still.

—Chinese proverb

As sinful commissions will stab the soul, so sinful omissions will starve the soul.

—Thomas Brooks

Failure is the line of least persistence.

—Stephanil Martino

There are three stages to life: youth, middle age, and “You’re looking good.”

—Unknown

To love to preach is one thing—to love those to whom we preach, quite another.

—Richard Cecil

A little boy said, “Sins of commission are the sins we commit, and the sins of omission are those we meant to commit but forgot.”

—Unknown

It’s probably even later than the fellow who says it’s later than you think thinks it is.

—Cincinnati *Enquirer*

Revenge is a common passion; it is the sin of the uninstructed. The savage deems it noble; but the religion of Christ, which is the sublime civilizer, emphatically condemns it. Why? Because religion ever seeks to ennoble man; and nothing so debases him as revenge.

—Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Do you know what is wrong with the world today? There’s too much theologian and not enough kneeologian.

—Dallas F. Billington

Not he who has little, but he who wishes for more is poor.

—Ray D. Everson

Too much patriotism today should be spelled pay-triotism.

—Rev. John Tennant

Take heed that an hour produce not that which may shame us forever.

—George Hutcheson

It is infamy to die and not be missed.

—Carlos Wilcox

There are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers here below.

—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The essence of liberalism is a false view of love.

—Wayne Van Gelderen Sr.

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor emeritus, Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana, and itinerant preacher.

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David C. Innes

How Can I Decide What Is Right for Me When Good Men Differ?

Timeless Biblical Principles That Define Right and Wrong for the Believer

As Christians, we all want to do the right thing. We want to please God. But we also want to get along with other church members and ministry leaders. The danger we face is going to one extreme or the other. If we become people pleasers, we are prone to compromise biblical truth. Yet if we become dogmatic where the Bible is not dogmatic, we can become proud and hardheaded. We find balance by remembering that we are ultimately responsible to God in the decisions we make. Romans 14:5 tells us that “one man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” Yet, a few verses later, Paul exhorts us to remember that “none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (v. 7). So our decisions also have an effect on others.

Along with other tests, here are a few that can help us in our decision-making process.

The “Others First” Test

Is what I am doing pleasing (helpful, inoffensive, acceptable) to others? As Romans 15:1–3 teaches, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”

We are not “islands unto ourselves.” We must consider the effect of our decisions on others. Does my decision consider the feelings and welfare of others first? First Corinthians 10:24 and 33 state, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth [benefit, welfare]. . . . Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.” How will my decision affect the outcome of the gospel message in others?

The Enslavement Test

Is what I am considering doing addictive? First Corinthians 6:12 states, “All things are lawful [allowed, permitted] unto me, but all things are not expedient [advantageous, profitable, useful]: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power [mastery, authority] of any.” Any substance or activity that I could not do without is an addiction. Am I being honest in my evaluation of this activity or substance? Will this become a bad habit for me?

Will it bring me into bondage? Second Peter 2:19 warns, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption [destruction, ruin]: for of whom [what] a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage [enslaved].” As a servant of Christ, I do not have the right to willfully become the slave of any other distracting force.

The Glory of God Test

Can I participate in this activity and do it to God’s glory? First Corinthians 10:31 dictates that “whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” That is not just a verse we quote before a meal at a Christian camp. It is God’s expectation for my life.

Can I do it in the name of Christ—with His endorsement and approval? Colossians 3:17 reads, “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.” It is pleasing to get along with others. It is more important to glorify God and do His bidding than to please myself or others in the decisions I make.

The Heart Motive Test

Remember that we are ultimately responsible to God in the decisions we make. So it is imperative that we keep our hearts in tune with the Lord as we make decisions in this life.

Does my decision come out of a pure (unmixed) heart? Jesus knew what naturally comes out of our hearts when we are not in tune with Him. In Matthew 15:19 He said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

Does it come out of pure motives? Titus 1:15 teaches us that “unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.”

There will always be disagreements between even the best of men. Our goal must be to make our decisions based upon the glory of God and the effect our decisions have on other people. Love for God and for our fellow man (both saved and unsaved) can guide us towards balance in our decisions.

Dr. David C. Innes pastors Hamilton Square Baptist Church in San Francisco, California.



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Creating Community in the Military Chapel

Continued from page 18

who have internalized Christ's love in such a way that His values become naturally shared with those around them." The application of this definition is multifaceted. It means that the community of believers does not seek out the pastor when they see a need to give grace, mercy, rebuke, exhortation, forgiveness, etc. They meet needs as Christ has met their own needs. His values flow out of them as naturally as perspiration off the brow of a house roofer in the Arizona heat in July. Community is honest. Community is merciful. Community is loving. Community exhorts to holiness. Community is sacrificial. Christian community reflects the very nature of relationship within the Trinity.

Back to 1991. Our congregation consisted of fifteen people in a dilapidated World-War-II chapel. I set to work with a singles group on Friday nights. My goal was to teach the singles God gave me to know that they were different from the world. Some on base told me that I would never get the singles out of the clubs on Friday nights and should try a different night of the week. I would respond, "We will have a great time *and* remember it the next day!" For this group I used short discussion-format booklets on a variety of Christian worldview themes such as service, money, purity, marriage, talent, vocation, etc. The format was very free-flowing and discussion-oriented. I wanted them to feel safe to discuss a worldview that they did not even know they had. It had been so easily absorbed from their secular education and media that they did not realize how their presuppositions affected their behavior. After the discussion time, we would go out to eat, to the gym on base, to a bowling alley, or to some other activity. I rarely returned home before 11:00 p.m. Fridays always began at 6:30 a.m., but this group saw a number accept Christ, and I was privileged to baptize many.

We began a "steak fry" the first Friday of the month. The maintenance guys cut a fifty-gallon drum in half, put it on a trailer, and then I pulled that grill to the dorms and cooked steaks for hundreds of singles every month. I called this the "Dorm Dweller Dinner." Senior enlisted and officers came out and cooked with me, and then the married women of the base got involved to fix side dishes and homemade desserts. This created "community" on the base and between many dorm unbelievers and believer families in base housing. Out of this came our Friday night small group, growing from one to forty-five in just two years. I disciplined an eighteen-year-old man in this group who today is a pastor in Illinois. I disciplined a twenty-two-year-old man who pastors today in California.

Out of my counseling and visitation around base, I knew I did not have time to counsel all the couples who came to me. Some days I would see eight young couples in eight hours. And I was just twenty-eight at the time! So I sat with four or five older couples (in the military, that means late thirties) and asked if they would start some couples small groups with me. They agreed to do so. In our home and one other home, we started two couples' small groups designed for discipleship and marriage-building. We ate a meal together, created childcare, and then spent an hour discussing marriage. Our groups grew to the point of about fifteen couples

in each group, and those groups multiplied into four groups of seven or eight couples. Again, they were used as entry points to the church, and numerous couples accepted Christ. The older couples who partnered with me grew as they were challenged to help other couples who grew up in spiritually broken homes.

Teens and Preteens

On Sunday nights I drew two or three of my best singles into helping me lead a teen small group. This group began with three or four and within two years had thirty each Sunday night. Again I wanted to find out what they thought and how they viewed the world. We used a very interactive discussion curriculum to get them to talk to me and our leaders. I wanted them to talk about anything that they questioned and left the environment very open for that type of discussion.

For the children, I gathered several mothers together, and they were able to begin AWANA as a Wednesday afternoon afterschool program. I had the privilege of leading the Bible time almost every Wednesday and saw several children come to Christ. We even created a small-group community for our children. We averaged about seventy-five to eighty kids every each week and even got Civil Engineering to paint an AWANA circle in the parking lot of the chapel where we could run our games.

In less than three years, and with my being gone five months during that time frame, the chapel attendance went from one hundred in three different services to nearly four hundred, with the service that I pastored growing from fifteen to 225. I led and trained leaders for four small groups each week in the evenings as well as an afternoon program for children. During these three years I had the privilege of baptizing about eighty people who had professed faith in Christ (twenty of those were military who had deployed with me in Saudi Arabia). I even had the chapel purchase a portable communion table that converted into a baptistery.

The AWANA program that started in 1992 is still active on the base. I recently ran into a chaplain from Beale AFB, and he told me he had used that baptistery recently. He wondered how an Air Force chapel had a baptistery for immersion, and I was able to tell him the whole story.

Small groups are an effective tool in creating community in a young, mobile, broken, and ethnically diverse society. It was a privilege to be a part of God's plan during that season on that base.

Dr. Michael D. Sproul is the senior pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church and chairman of the Board of International Baptist College and Seminary and Tri-City Christian Academy as well as the president of International Baptist Missions.



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Small People in Small Chairs

Way back in the olden days when I was growing up, our church had small groups, but we didn't call them that. We called them Sunday school. There were no puppets or PowerPoints. There were small people on small chairs gathered round a teacher. And there was flannelgraph.

Flannel fabric panels painted with landscapes (rocky deserts, lush hillsides, shining lakes) were smoothed onto a board set on a spindly easel. The teacher placed brightly colored figures wearing Bible-time clothes onto the flannel and told us the most amazing stories. We looked at them and learned.

There was a garden with a special tree and a serpent with a sneaky smile. Adam and Eve wearing leaves, then skins. A bleeding sheep and an angel with a shining sword. Cain with his vegetables, frowning at Abel with his lamb. There is right and there is wrong, and God lets us choose.

Noah in a striped bathrobe watching pairs of animals parade into a big boat with only one door. Baby Moses floating in a wicker clothes basket. A scowling black-eyed Pharaoh in gold sandals. Flies, hail, grasshoppers, and a lamb's blood on a door. Parents hurrying their children down a dry path through deep water. Rules written on a stone by God's own finger. Dancing around a golden cow. Moses smashing the stone. A tent in the desert with one room just for God. Manna every morning. Water from a rock. God judges sin but takes care of His children.

Young Samuel barefoot in the temple moonlight: Speak, Lord! David holding a slingshot and a giant's head. A boy sharing fish and bread from his lunchbox. Even small people can serve God.

A baby lamb nosing a baby in a manger. Men in fancy clothes riding camels and carrying presents. Jesus with small people sitting on His lap and looking up into His kind eyes. A crown of sharp thorns. Nails, a spear, a cross. A shining angel on a round stone. Jesus died—but now He is alive!

Truth moved from the flannelboard into our heads and hearts. As we grew taller and moved from one small group to the next, it was repeated and reinforced. We heard it over and over, and as our understanding grew, the faith of our fathers gradually became our own.

I was still a very small person in one of these small groups when I told my parents I wanted to be saved. When they asked if I understood just what salvation meant, I patiently explained it to them, with my mind filled with one clear

image: Jesus bleeding on the cross—the Lamb of God, dying for me.

Pictures stay in the minds of small people—and so does Scripture. In the back seat of the car on the way to Sunday school, I practiced my memory verse, hoping for a star to put on the chart thumbtacked to the classroom wall. Enough stars, and I could choose a prize from the teacher's surprise box. As the years passed, the memory passages got longer and the rewards bigger (a week at junior camp!). We were memorizing for rewards, that's true, but the lasting prize, as those wise people leading our small groups knew, was God's Word stored up in our hearts. I can still quote most of those passages.

And I can still quote the teacher who one Sunday morning asked our teen girls' class to remember the last thing we'd done wrong. Then she said, "If you were the only person who had ever lived, and that was the only sin you had ever committed, Jesus would still have had to die to save you from hell. And He would have, because He loves you."

I don't remember anything else from that day in that small group, but I do remember what happened in the worship service that followed. As we observed the Lord's Supper, I thought about what my Sunday school teacher had said. The image of Jesus dying on the cross for me became so real that I cried as I thanked Him for saving me—from that last sin and so, so many more. That day I promised Him I would serve Him all my life.

One recent Sunday morning, I was the teacher with small people in small chairs gathered round. I moved old Abraham slowly up the side of a painted-flannel Mount Moriah with young Isaac trudging behind and told them that amazing story. I heard their gasps as I laid Abraham's boy on a stone altar and put a scary knife in his father's hand and their relieved sighs when the flannel-backed ram sent by God appeared, stuck in a flannel-backed bush.

I hope they never forget those pictures, because they are full of truth. And I hope small groups like these never disappear, for they can still change lives.

Claudia Barba grew up in a ministry home and now serves the Lord with her husband, Dave, through Press On! Ministries, planting and assisting churches in the USA and abroad (www.ipresson.com). She also writes women's Bible study books and speaks to women's groups.



Regional Reports

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Joe Willis

Monday evening and Tuesday morning, January 28 and 29, about seventy individuals gathered at the picturesque Westside Baptist Church in Greeley, Colorado, for the annual FBFI Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship.

The theme of this year's exciting meeting was "Tenacity in Tribulation." Dan Unruh (Rocky Mountain Regional Coordinator and host pastor) led off the event with a Spirit-filled message on "Faithfulness in Affliction." Dr. Kevin Schaal, FBFI president and pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona, delivered the second message of the evening entitled, "Walking Boldly into Tribulation."

After an evening of fellowship and rest, the attendees reconvened the following morning for a men's and women's split session. Mrs. Juanita Unruh spoke to the women on the theme of "Redo, Revive, and Remind," with Scripture challenges from the Book of Psalms. The men were challenged with an inspiring message from Pastor Mike Clement of Bible Baptist Church of Scottsbluff, Nebraska, entitled "Beware of Shallow Soil." What a blessing and miracle to have Mike here at his meeting, since he has been recovering from a serious tractor accident just two years prior!

The last two sessions of the morning were both conducted by Dr. Schaal on the themes of "Dealing with Trials" and "Preparing Your Church for Tribulation." All of the conference messages can be found at wbcgreeley.org/sermons/.

One of the highlights of the conference was a time of testimony from many of the attendees about God's grace in

times of trials. The music theme for this year's conference was "We Are More than Conquerors." A special thanks to Larry Robbins for leading the music and to the Westside Baptist congregation for sacrificing their time and energy to host this event.



Winter Board Meeting

Doug Wright

Staying informed is a challenge! A pastor's orbit is not simply the congregation sitting in front of him—he must acknowledge that the people in his congregation are touching and overlapping with people in circles with less biblical discernment than he. The simplest solution is to ignore what is going on in other circles, but that may also be the most dangerous solution, since it conflicts with Peter's warning to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Pastors need to know what is going on in their orbit.

The FBFI Winter Board Meeting (February 18–19) has long encompassed more than just taking care of in-house business. As usual, we had some great reports from the standing committees. The finances are in order, and future activities are receiving top-notch planning. From setting the course for *FrontLine* magazine to making decisions about regional and national meetings and discussing policy and position statements, a lot of work was done. FBFI is as active and more exciting than ever! Much of our time, however, is spent on issues that ministries will have to confront. In order to effectively confront those issues, information is essential, and that is one of the primary purposes of FBFI.

The three topics of discussion this year were

1. "Preservation and the Text and Version Debate" (David Shumate)—Dr. Shumate did a masterful job addressing five views of preservation. The purpose was to further a discussion about how to practically apply previous FBFI resolutions and position statements. Nothing in our position has changed, but applying it to some of our meetings has been a matter of discussion for several years. Dr. Shumate's presentation helped tie up some loose ends and gave us unanimity as to how we will proceed.
2. "Misconduct in the Ministry: Prevention and Response" (Bud Steadman)—The revelation of misconduct among Catholic priests has led to scrutiny of other ministries. This scrutiny could eventually affect FBFI ministries. We welcome Spirit-led efforts to promote God-honoring ministry. Rather than lecture on the topic, Dr. Steadman led a discussion to glean information that he and his compatriots will use to make suggestions.
3. "Social Justice and Fundamentalism" (Kevin Schaal)—Social justice is once again a topic of discussion in evangelical ministries. John MacArthur and other Christian leaders launched a website presenting "The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel." They invited others to sign it. As of the writing of this article, 10,564 people have affirmed the statement.

While MacArthur and the other evangelicals expose the misrepresentation of Scripture and the danger to the definition of the gospel, Al Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), not only did not sign it but took time in chapel to explain his reasoning. His hesitancy intensified the debate meaning every pastor needs to be prepared for questions on social justice.

As mentioned above, these are issues that may spill into one's congregation whether the pastor is prepared for them or not.

Thanks and compliments to Pastor Schaal and the staff at Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona. They provided wonderful meals, facilities, and a sweet spirit for us to fellowship while discussing issues.



NOTABLE QUOTES

Half the pleasure of solitude comes from having with us some friend to whom we can say how sweet solitude is.—William Jay

We never test the resources of God until we attempt the impossible.—F. B. Meyer

When we make self the end of prayer, it is not worship but self-seeking.—Thomas Manton

God works by means; and it is by his people that he principally carries on his cause in the world. They are his witnesses. They are his servants. He first makes them the subjects of his grace, and then the mediums. He first turns them from rebels into friends, and then employs them to go and beseech others to be reconciled unto God. For they know the wretchedness of a state of alienation from him. They know the blessedness of a return. They have “tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Their own experience gives them earnestness and confidence in saying to those around them, “O taste, and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” —William Jay

Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment for extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces.—Matthew Henry

Those who sing the loudest in the kingdom will be those who on earth had the greatest suffering. We pity them now, but then we shall almost envy them.—Andrew Bonar

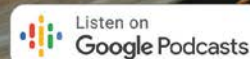
I must learn to relate everything to the primary goal, maintaining it without interruption. My worth to God publicly is measured by what I really am in my private life. Is my primary goal to please Him and to be acceptable to Him, or is it something less, no matter how lofty it may sound?—J. Oswald Sanders

One of the roots of the Christian life is dependability, and you cannot have spirituality without dependability any more than you can have a begonia without a begonia stalk.—A. W. Tozer

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

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lan-guage | noun 1.a. Communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols.

ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in him; and without him was made that was made. 4 In and the life was the light of light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose

I write from the sunny State of Texas, where my parents live. Down here I'm surrounded by Spanish, a language I speak (though with some big vocabulary gaps). I noticed something interesting about the way American English speakers commonly pronounce Spanish words: sometimes they "Anglicize" them and sometimes they don't.

As always, as I'm contractually obligated to do (as I can't help doing so, I might as well have a contract for it), I saw in this a lesson for how we read the Bible.

We pronounce the proper noun "Guadalupe" close to the way Spanish speakers do: GWA-duh-LOO-pay. We like unaccented vowels and Spanish doesn't, so we say "duh" where they would say "da." And we don't really have the same sounds Spanish does, so our "-pay" isn't quite like their "peh." But, clearly, we're *not* saying what we would tend to say if "Guadalupe" were fully Anglicized: GWA-duh-LOOP. (That is, in fact, how we pronounce the French equivalent, Guadaloupe, the Caribbean island.)

But with "Los Angeles," it's totally different. From a Spanish perspective, we utterly mangle "Los Angeles." Instead of saying loce-AN-hell-ace, we give it the full gringo: las-ANN-juh-liss. I would have been kicked out of Spanish class and trampled by bulls at Pamplona for a pronunciation like that.

But it is utterly common and completely normal, linguistically speaking. The millions of LA residents—including ethnically Latino residents—who pronounce the name of their city the gringo way are not wrong. This is what languages do when they steal words from other tongues.

And it's what we've done with biblical Hebrew and Greek words, especially proper nouns. The city of Ai was certainly not pronounced AY-eye, but we can do what we want; it's a free planet (linguistically speaking). "Moses," "Israel," "Jesus," "Thessalonica," "Hallelujah"—we're going to mangle them with our English tongues, so we might as well own it.

Another example: some people get very hung up on the supposed de-Judaizing of the name of the person we call James. His real name, they say, is Jacob. They're right and wrong. Yes, "James" is "Jacob" (Greek: *Iakobos*), but "James" is just one possible way of Anglicizing "Jacob" (it's a long story). "James" is the "Los Angeles" of Anglicization, not the "Guadalupe." Capeesh? (From Italian *capisce*, ka-PEE-shay.)

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



We are so familiar with the word “church” that we rarely pause to consider why the Lord should have chosen that particular term to identify the new institution that He would found and build in connection with inaugurating the new covenant. The word translated “church” (*ekklēsia*) occurs about 115 times in the NT—only 3 times in the Gospels (in Matt. 16 and 18), 20 times in Revelation (all but one of those are in chapters 1–3), 24 times in Acts, and 66 times in Paul’s letters, making Paul the prime expositor of the concept of the church (especially in 1 Cor. and Eph.).

Defining the Church

The Greek word *ekklēsia* has two basic senses. First, it has the general/secular sense of an *assembly* or *gathering*, whether describing an unruly mob (Acts 19:32, 41) or an orderly, “lawful” civil assembly (Acts 19:39). Second, and most common in the NT by far, is a more specialized/sacralized sense of an *assembly with a religious identity or spiritual orientation, congregation*. In this sense it may refer to the congregation of Israel (Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12), or the gathering of saints in heaven (Heb. 12:23), or an assembly of believers—including both localized groups (e.g., the Christians in a particular city or region), whether they happen to be gathered together (1 Cor. 11:18; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15) or dispersed (Acts 8:1; 9:31), and the universal body of believers (Christians everywhere and in all times (e.g., Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; all Ephesian references; Col. 1, 2).

In other words, the NT takes a common secular term and actually creates a new, distinctively spiritual concept. In terms of NT usage and depiction, then, the church may be defined as the *confessional community*—whether local or universal, gathered or dispersed, synchronous or historical—*of all those who hold in common a confession of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, according to the teachings of the NT*.

What about the English word “church”? The word “church” is lexically completely unrelated to *ekklēsia*. The English word *church*, Scottish *kirk*, German *Kirche*, Finnish *kirkko*, etc., derive from a different Greek word altogether: *kuriokos*, “belonging to the Lord”—a term that occurs only twice in the NT (1 Cor. 11:20, “Lord’s supper”; Rev. 1:10, “Lord’s day”).

Is the Church a Building?

Traditionally, the official theologically “correct” answer to that question is no. But the eventual historically correct answer is yes. It’s true that *ekklēsia* is never used in the NT of physical meeting places (buildings). Does that mean it’s illegitimate for us to use the word “church” that way today? Not at all. In fact, *ekklēsia* began showing up within a century or so after the NT (in the late 100s–200s) in patristic writings

with reference to the *building* or place in which the church was meeting (Lampe, *Patristic Greek Testament*, II:432).

So why was *ekklēsia* not used that way in the NT? It was not because of a theologically purposeful NT emphasis on the people rather than the place; rather, it was simply an accident of history. The NT never uses *ekklēsia* in the sense of a *building* simply because the NT doesn’t record enough of church history to get to the point where dedicated buildings were being constructed specifically for the meetings of the *ekklēsia*. The earliest churches simply met in private homes (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15) or public buildings (Acts 19:9). In time, however, buildings eventually began to be constructed specifically for believers to gather together for collective worship, and these buildings were very naturally called (by native Greek speakers) “churches.”

There’s a lesson in that history. Early patristic usage of *ekklēsia* with reference to the church building should caution against making the argument that the NT *purposely* presents *ekklēsia* as a purely and exclusively personal or spiritual concept.

Is the Church a “Called Out” Body?

The word *ekklēsia* is linguistically a construct of two terms: *ek* [out of] + *kaleō* [to call]. Based on that root meaning, the church is often defined as a *called-out body of believers*. Is that a valid description or definition of the church? Or is it fallacious to define a word on the basis of its root meaning (i.e., its etymology)?

Much has been written about what is called the etymological fallacy, in connection with the etymology of *ekklēsia* and other NT words (cf. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*). But there’s just as much confusion about what the etymological fallacy is *not* as what it is. The etymological fallacy is the assumption that a word may be accurately *defined* on the basis of its etymology (origin). In other words, to argue that a word *means* something *solely* or *primarily* on the basis of its etymology—that and that alone is the etymological fallacy. Etymology does not determine meaning; usage determines meaning. (For example, the etymology of words such as *groovy*, *hip*, *cool*, or *sick* would be highly misleading for determining the contemporary *meaning* of these synonyms.)

What is *not* the etymological fallacy? First, to *call attention* to etymology in discussing or explaining a word is not the etymological fallacy. Second, to *use* etymology to *help explain* or *illustrate* a word meaning is not the etymological fallacy.

Etymologies explain a word’s *origin*; that’s all. So for example, *ekklēsia* in its original usage (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) referred to “a regularly convoked assembly, chiefly applied to the general assembly of Athenian citizens.” What, you may ask, does “convoked” mean? It means “to

An In-House Discussion

What's in a Name?

call together” or “to summon to assemble.” In other words, the term in its original secular usage really did refer to a *called-out assembly*.

Etymologies may, in fact, be extremely *relevant* to a word's meaning—perhaps not for words like *pineapple*, or *butterfly*, or *Grape Nuts*, or *peanut*, or *marshmallow*; but certainly for words like *doghouse*, *treehouse*, *ice cream*, *teapot*, *dishwasher*, and *hyperventilate*. But even when etymology is not a reliable guide to a word's current *meaning*, it can be extremely valuable for *imaging* or *illustrating* a valid sense of the word.

So to argue that *ekklēsia* (and hence “church”) *means* “an assembly of believers called out from the world by God” because it comes from the root “call” and the prefix “out of” would be transgressing into etymological fallacy territory. (Among other problems, the alleged etymological “meaning” cannot account for either the concept of “world” or “God” in the etymology.)

However, to argue that an *ekklēsia* in its predominant NT usage *refers* to an assembly of believers called out from the world by God *because* Jesus and the apostles taught that that is, in fact, what believers are, both individually and collectively—that is not an etymological fallacy. The use of *ekklēsia* as the NT's prime designation for a body of believers, combined with (a) the prominence of *kaleō* in the NT to describe believers, in the NT, (b) the exegetical expression of 1 Peter 2:9 (God *called* [*kaleō*] *believers out of* [*ek*] *darkness*), and (c) theological facts such as John 15:19; 17:6 (that we have been chosen/given *out of the world*) and Acts 15:14 (that God's purpose in this age is to *take out of the Gentiles* a people for His name), legitimately leads to the conclusion that *the church (ekklēsia) is a called(-out) body of believers*. That's not the same as saying that *ekklēsia means* “a called-out body of believers”; *ekklēsia means the assembly or congregation of believers, local or universal, gathered or collective*.

So while etymology itself is not a valid basis for defining *ekklēsia* as a “called-out assembly of believers,” the etymology is nonetheless suggestive, illustrative, and consistent with NT theology about the nature and character of the church. It is, indeed, a called-out body of believers.

The Inauguration of the Church

Views on the beginning of the church have varied. Some have argued that the church actually began with Adam (Kuiiper) or Abraham (Bannerman; Hodge). Others say it started at Sinai (Clowney), or during Jesus' ministry (Johnston), or with Paul (Bullinger). But there are a number of reasons for holding that the Church began at Pentecost.

First, the NT identifies the church as a previously unrevealed mystery (Eph. 2–3)—so it's post-OT. Second, Jesus introduced the concept of the church late in His ministry as

a future entity (Matt. 16:18)—so it's post-ministry of Jesus. Third, Christ became the head of the body only after the resurrection (Eph. 1:20–23)—so it's post-resurrection. Fourth, incorporation into the body of Christ occurs when Christ baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13)—as predicted by John (Matt. 3:11); and as of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry, this was still future (Acts 1:45) and occurred beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).

In fact, there is a fascinating chronological correlation between Pentecost as the inauguration of the church and Sinai as the inauguration of Israel. The Calvary event (at Passover) resulted in the birth of the church at Pentecost 50 days later. (Technically Pentecost is 50 days from the Feast of Firstfruits, the first Sunday following Passover.) The Exodus event (the original Passover) resulted in the birth of the nation Israel 50 days later. Walter Kaiser (“Exodus,” *EBC*) traces the following timeline:

- Exod. 12:2—The Passover and its preparation would mark the *first month* of the Jewish calendar. This is followed by the instruction to take a lamb on the 10th day of that month, keep it penned up under observation until the 14th day, then slay and eat it in the evening (the beginning of the 15th day). Abib, then, became the first month of their religious year, making Abib 15 the day of the Exodus.
- Exod. 16:1—Israel entered the wilderness of Sin exactly one month later on Iyyar 15.
- Exod. 19:1, 10–11—Israel entered the Sinai wilderness in the third month after the Exodus. The phrase “on the same day” (v.1 indicates Sivan 1, making it 47 days since the Exodus (counting inclusively from the day of the Exodus, Abib 15). Israel encamped that night, and 19:3ff. records the interchange between Moses and God the following day (Day 48). In that interchange, God instructed the people (19:10) to consecrate themselves “today [Day 48] and tomorrow [Day 49], and be ready the third day [Day 50]” for the institution of the Mosaic covenant that will inaugurate an ethnic race (the descendants of Abraham) into a national entity (the nation Israel).

This fits with the traditional Jewish recognition that Pentecost celebrated the giving of the law on Sinai. Israel and the church were founded within exactly the same time-frame after the original Exodus and the later, greater, spiritual exodus (Luke 9:30–31), respectively.

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of Theology & Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

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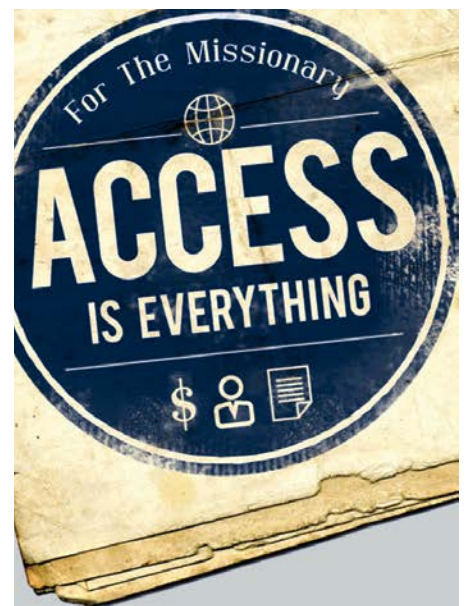
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Ministry in the Sea Services

The Making of US Navy Chaplains

Author's note: *I am writing on my own behalf, and the thoughts and opinions expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the US Government, Department of Defense, the US Navy, or the Navy Chaplain Corps.*

In a letter to the Massachusetts militia dated 11 October 1798, President John Adams stated, “We have no government armed with power of contending with human passions unbri-dled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Adams’ statement still holds true today. We are a nation whose very survival depends upon morally upright and godly citizens, and it is of utmost importance that our country selects the finest individuals to serve in its military: men and women who possess both the competence and character to defend the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic, with the requisite honor, courage, and commitment.

Consequently, from the inception of each service’s chaplain corps, chaplains have played a vital role in strengthening the spiritual and moral fiber of individual service members as well as the command structures they serve. Navy chaplains do this through the effective delivery of four core competencies: **providing** religious support for one’s faith group, **facilitating** for the religious needs of others, **caring** for all individuals regardless of their faith tradition or lack thereof, and **advis-ing** the command. While these four aspects of ministry are demanding in and of themselves, Navy chaplains have an extra hurdle to overcome by navigating their ministry to the vastly different Sea Service cultures, whether Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marines. As in local-church ministry, chaplains must understand those whom they serve and the conditions under which such service is rendered. However, chaplains also must be willing to work closely and collegially with those from various belief systems in a secular institution while remaining faithful to the tenets of the religious organization that sent them. It is a challenging tightrope to tread as chaplains learn to balance the compet-ing pressures placed upon them. Hence, the responsibility to screen ministerial credentials of chaplain applicants falls on the endorsing agents of each religious organization, while the institutional equipping of chaplains rests squarely on the screening boards and instructors assigned to the three military branch chaplain schoolhouses (Army, Navy, and Air Force).

In the Navy, transforming civilian ministers into Professional Naval Chaplains starts at Officer Development



Navy chaplain students receiving instruction from a Marine drill instructor at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina.



Approximately thirty feet from the ground, Navy chaplain students traverse two rope courses at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

School for five weeks and then continues on through the training offered at the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center. Currently, this latter program is taught primarily by an Assistant Marine Officer Instructor and me. It is composed of three phases, the first of which familiarizes students on pertinent Department of Defense and Department of Navy directives. The second then builds on that knowledge and requires students to develop specific physical and ministerial skill sets to be utilized in expeditionary environments, while the third phase offers students an opportunity to learn and apply Navy-specific programs for their use out in the fleet.

If you are interested in serving as a military chaplain with the FBFI, please contact Chaplain (Col.) Joe Willis, USA (ret.) for more information at chapwillis@gmail.com.

Chaplain Rob Johnson currently serves as the Professional Naval Chaplaincy Basic Leadership Course Officer at the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center, where he has the privilege of training every chaplain entering naval service.



The Navy Chief of Chaplains joins leadership and staff of the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center after a recent Professional Naval Chaplaincy Basic Leadership Course graduation.



A Navy chaplain student successfully navigates the rappel tower located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.



Navy chaplain students pose on the flight deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) while undergoing a ministry familiarization training trip.



A recent Professional Naval Chaplaincy Basic Leadership Course class poses in front of the Iwo Jima monument located on Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina.

Failed or Successful Leadership



We read in 1 Chronicles 13:1, “And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.” David was a great leader for the Lord and was very wise, and we see in this passage that he consulted with “every leader.” Leaders develop leadership in others. Dr. Lee Robertson, a man of God, declared, “Everything rises or falls on leadership.” I strongly believe that this is an accurate observation regarding leadership.

In this article, let us consider some leaders in the Scriptures who failed.

First, King Saul is a prime example of failed leadership. He failed because he violated what the Lord clearly instructed him to do. We see this in 1 Samuel 15:2–3: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not.” But what did Saul do? Verse 9 says, “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.” The Lord said, “Spare them not.” That was His divine command! However, Saul and the people directly disobeyed God’s command and spared Agag and the best of the animals.

Second, another example of failed leadership is found in 1 Kings 13. The Lord sent a prophet to confront King Jeroboam. The prophet of God confronted the king as he was instructed of the Lord; then Jeroboam invited the prophet to go to his house and eat with him. But the man of God answered in verses 8–10, “If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel.” But there was another prophet in Bethel who followed after the first prophet and said to him in verse 18, “I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.” In verse 19 we see what the first prophet did: “So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.” This prophet failed as a leader for

the Lord, and it ended up costing him his life; for in verse 24 we read, “And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase.” Then we read this heartbreaking statement from the mouth of the lying prophet in verse 26: “It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him.”

Third, the Word of God records the failed leadership of Moses. How did this great man of God fail as a leader? Moses, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt, who parted the Red Sea by the power of God, who received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai? We see his failure as a leader in Numbers 20:8. Here the Lord said to Moses, “Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.” But look what Moses did. Numbers 20:11 states, “And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.” Moses did not do what God commanded him. God told him to speak to the rock; instead, Moses struck the rock twice. He disobeyed the Lord’s explicit instructions and therefore suffered the consequences. We read in verse 12, “And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”

Moses, a leader for God, failed to obey Him and could not enter the Promised Land. The prophet in 1 Kings 13, a leader for God, failed to obey Him and it cost him his life. King Saul, a leader for God, failed to obey Him and it cost him his kingship.

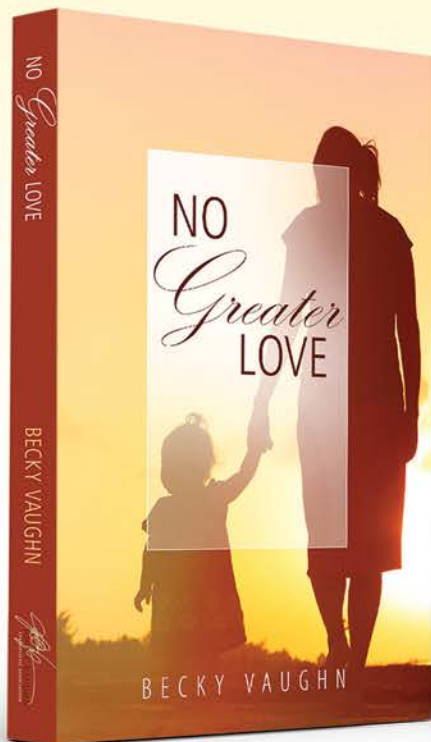
No leader is above God’s authority. If you disobey Him, beware of the consequences as a leader.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at jerrysivnksty@gmail.com.

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—Becky Vaughn



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