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# FrontLine

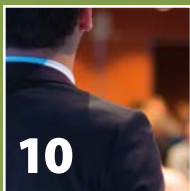
BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Christians  
Counseling  
Christians

# Christians Counseling Christians



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Our sincere thanks to Mark Herbster for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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Scripture is clear that one of the responsibilities of every Christian is to help restore other believers to usefulness. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Clearly, God expects His people to be involved in counseling others. “Restoring others” implies that a believer notices others’ sin struggles and is ready and willing to speak the truth with a right disposition, all the while acknowledging that he himself may need to be on the receiving end of spiritual counsel soon.

In a world of individualism and narcissism, many Christians are hesitant, if not totally opposed, to stepping into situations to help with biblical counsel. Excuses are made, and others’ problems are treated as just that: their *own* problems. Some may think, “It is none of my business. Let him *ask* for help if he thinks he needs it.” Often Christians do not even try to help, due to a feeling of inadequacy and lack of experience. None of these cultural or personal issues should cause Christians to ignore the clear command of Scripture, however. There is a great need for Christians to step up and step into the lives of others to provide the help that they need.

The unique goal of *biblical* counseling is that it would remain expressly tied to God’s Word. Humanistic psychological help, in contrast, cannot provide satisfying answers that lead to lifelong change. Only God can bring that through His Word and His Spirit. This is the hope that every Christian counselor has as he seeks to help others. He

is not alone; the Creator of the world is on his side!

That hope is the motivation for this issue of *FrontLine* magazine. The contributors are all skilled at utilizing God’s truth to help others, and they desire to motivate their readers to do the same. We hope that the result will be that more believers seek opportunities to counsel others, leading to lasting change to the glory of God. May these articles inspire believers to be involved in the restoration of others to usefulness for God!

This issue begins with two articles concerning the heart of counseling and the sufficiency of the Bible. These foundational themes presented by Bruce Meyer are followed by two practical methodology articles: Bryan Brock presents the relevant concept that preaching is a primary means of counsel, and Kevin Schaal provides a helpful resource on parents counseling their children. Concluding the issue are three more narrowly themed articles: one on repentance by Andrew Goodwill, another on handling grief by Ben Flegal, and finally one I contributed concerning a Christian’s response to a confusing world.

Comprehensively treating this subject in one magazine issue would be impossible, since there are so many different counseling issues to handle. But it is our prayer that the ideas presented here will motivate Christians to be active in the lives of others with a confidence that the truth of God is the only thing that will solve the problems of humanity.

—Mark Herbster



## Would you like a good Christian radio station in your town?

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Pastor Mark Dupont,  
First Baptist Church of Beaver, Utah

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Cameron Pollock's name was inadvertently misspelled in the March/April 2021 issue of *FrontLine*. We apologize for this error.

**Y**esterday's spring pastors' fellowship meeting went very well. About seventy-five were in attendance. As we discussed the issue of the aging pastorate and fewer men entering the ministry, I referenced *FrontLine* magazine, and then I distributed the issues you sent. They were all taken—including the personal copy I brought. . . .

*Dr. David Oliver  
Belding, Michigan*

**T**o be brief, my purpose is to request permission to translate an occasional article from *FrontLine* magazine into Spanish for nonprofit ministry use to share with others on my [literaturabautista.com](http://literaturabautista.com) website. I'm a missionary on the border with Mexico, and my pastor is Johnny Daniels in Puerto Rico, who is on the board emeritus of FBFI. I have had the privilege of translating for Dr. Vaughn and other speakers in FBFI conferences in the past in Puerto Rico and once in Bolivia. A second request while I'm communicating is permission to use an occasional photo from *FrontLine* magazine in my ministry website. I consider this second request less important, so if it would cause a lengthy delay in obtaining an answer, I can move on as I have other sources for graphics. My most important request is permission to translate an occasional article. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

*Missionary Calvin George  
Mexico*

**W**e came to the States in October and will not be returning to Spain. We were on the field for fifty-three years, forty-nine of them in Spain. Now we are trying to "discover América again," not an easy task in some ways, but we are making it. The Lord has been super-abundantly good to us all these years, and we praise Him for it.

*Dennis Flower  
Simpsonville, SC*

**Willie Eugene "Gene" Gurganus**

passed away January 2, 2021, at age ninety-one. He was a graduate of Bob Jones University and served for seventeen years as a missionary in Bangladesh. He also served as a representative for ABWE International for twenty-five years and in Vision 20/20 Asia for sixteen years. He authored many pamphlets and books, including *Truth and Freedom*, which was translated into several languages. A missionary to the end, he continued to pass out tracts to staff members while hospitalized in December and January.



From **Dr. Wayne Vawter** (Lebanon, Wisconsin): I always enjoy the *FrontLine* with timely topics, current information, and biblical challenges. I have been a part of the FBFI for all of my ministry of over fifty years. Last September I closed out my nineteenth year as director of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Baptist Churches, and I have passed that position along to Dr. Scott Jones, who will do a fine job of taking that ministry on to the next level. God has turned Wisconsin, once known as the graveyard of evangelism, into a growing mission field with over 250 independent Baptists churches. I am still available to do pulpit supply as WFBC Staff Evangelist and am available at [wfbcb66@gmail.com](mailto:wfbcb66@gmail.com).



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# The Heart of Counseling

## Getting Below the Surface Problems to the Heart of the Issue

**A**dmittedly, there are those within our circles who doubt the efficacy of biblical counseling.<sup>1</sup> There are too many reasons for this belief to address all of them, but for this article let's focus on one main reason—the failure to look beyond behavior to heart issues.<sup>2</sup> BC as God prescribes it is effective in solving personal problems, including those identified as “psychological,” since the Scriptures bring about sanctification and sanctification is what BC is about (John 17:17).<sup>3</sup> But, effective BC focuses on the root heart beliefs and attitudes more than mere behavior. Without this inward focus, there is no biblical heart change even though there might be an outward change in behavior.

One of the key issues in BC is the need to discover and address root causes of problems. For instance, self-injury is a particularly destructive problem. The counselee needs to stop the destructive behaviors. Although severe, the self-injury, however, is merely a surface problem—we call it a fruit problem rather than a root problem. It is a symptom of a theological (“belief” problem) in the heart rather than just a behavioral problem. Bad theology always results in bad behavior. This concept is often hard to accept because the presenting problem, such as cutting, can be of great concern to those around the addict. But if the counselor investigates further, he will discover that the counselee is using the addiction to “medicate” a problem he has in his soul. His bad theology is that he can acquire “wholeness” or comfort without God, the gospel, or the Scriptures.

For example, let's assume the counselee has suffered some trauma (abuse, assault, or loss) that dominates his thinking.

He assumes that the only way he can escape the troubling memories and resulting pain is by smothering the feelings with his self-injurious behavior. Although the problem of cutting is painful, the real root issue is what the individual is using the behavior to achieve. The root issue is the sinful passions the person is desiring. In our rebellion, we find ways to satisfy our soul in ways that are contrary to God's methods. The real tragedy is the alienation the cutting brings upon that person because of his faulty beliefs.

### **Biblical Theology of the Heart**

The Bible provides a well-rounded theology concerning the inner person.<sup>4</sup> Proverbs alone gives us some helpful foundational truths with seventy-seven passages on the heart.

The data on the heart suggest that the heart is our place of thinking, feeling, and making choices. For instance, God teaches us that the purposes of the heart are deep and that only those with understanding can draw them out (Prov. 20:5). This passage, among others, also indicates that our hearts involve our “understanding.” Proverbs 20:9 teaches us that no one can make his heart pure, because our perverted hearts devise evil (6:14). Jesus confirmed that sin comes from the heart rather than the body, our environment, or external influences (Mark 7:14–23; cf. James 1:13–15). Because the heart reflects the nature of man (Prov. 27:19), we need vigilantly to guard them, for what comes out of the heart determines one's direction (4:23). For all these reasons, man must remain in a constant dependency on God for the wisdom to remain on the right path (3:5–6). The entire Book of Proverbs provides

a contrast between the wise and foolish. James 3:13–18 mirrors this choice between the wisdom from heaven vs. the “wisdom” from below.

Paul continues this theology in the New Testament, but he more often uses the word “mind” for the inner man rather than heart (Rom. 1:28; 7:23; 8:5–6; 12:2; Eph. 2:3; 4:17, 23). He describes both the effects of sin on the human mind (Rom. 1; Eph. 2) and the necessary remedy we find in Christ through salvation (Eph. 2) and sanctification (Eph. 4). From both the OT and NT, believers receive a helpful description of our problem of the inner man and the solution through Christ.

### **Biblical Solution: Laser-Guided Truths to the Faulty Heart Belief**

When Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4:1–11, Jesus’ response was not behavioral in nature but attitudinal. In other words, Jesus directed what I call a “laser-guided truth” to the core unbelief that the temptation was soliciting. Let’s look at just the first two temptations for examples. In the first temptation (turn stones to bread, v. 3), Jesus recognized that the issue in the temptation was to bypass the timing of God’s will for eating through instant gratification. Jesus refuted this faulty teaching with Deuteronomy 8:3 (Matt. 4:4). The laser-guided truth was that we are to live by every word that proceeds from God’s mouth (an important text on the inspiration of the Scriptures), since those bread-words sustain life. Had Jesus followed Satan’s lead, He would have been substituting the immediate gratification of physical bread for following God’s timing and direction. Admittedly, there is no command in the Scriptures against turning stones into bread, but the issue was more about whose will Jesus would follow—God’s or Satan’s (or one’s own heart in our case). Contrary to popular “Hallmark theology,” those who follow their hearts usually end up in sinful self-service rather than evidencing love for God and others. This temptation was a solicitation to fulfill a legitimate need in the wrong way.

In the second temptation, Satan, following Jesus’ pattern, used the Scriptures for his argument by quoting Psalm 91:11–12 out of context (Matt. 4:5–6). Jesus recognized that He would be tempting God to do what God hadn’t promised—to protect us while engaging in reckless behavior.<sup>5</sup> The temptation, however, isn’t about base jumping, but base jumping without a parachute while expecting God to protect us from our own foolish choices (a definite theological and attitudinal heart problem). Such a practice is rooted in a faulty theology about God, namely, that He *owes me protection* even when I’m acting in reckless ways.

The core of this temptation is to substitute an alternative to worshipping God while expecting glory for Jesus Himself (something He already would have). The temptation is ironic, since Jesus received glory through His death and resurrection and is inherently worthy of worship without this exchange. The core of this temptation is the desire for self-glory through a counterfeit plan that bypasses God and His will.

A second passage provides us with even more details about our heart struggles and God’s solutions. In one short paragraph James taught on the connections between

the way we think and the way we act (James 3:13–18). He provides a sharp contrast between the wisdom from God versus the “wisdom” of this world. He begins with a question about those who are wise and understanding among the believers (v. 13). His question goes to the heart of a biblical counselor, because his answer is that believers will know who is wise by those who demonstrate their good works in a meek wisdom. James uses words such as “bitter envying” and “strife in your hearts” to describe attitudes in our hearts that drive bad behaviors and evil practices (vv. 14–16). James teaches, therefore, that there are only two choices of worldviews (theology) that govern our lives—either the wisdom from God or the wisdom from the world (v. 17). These theologies produce the respective behaviors that correspond to those ways of thinking (vv. 13, 15–16). Furthermore, these theologies produce both behaviors and results that make them noticeably different from the other. James describes the wisdom from above as being well-behaved, gentle, pure, peaceful, reasonable, merciful, good, impartial, and sincere. In contrast, James describes the wisdom from below as bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, disorderly, evil, arrogant, self-deceiving, earthly, self-seeking, and demonic. Finally, the behaviors of each category begin with the heart condition of the individual as each person responds to his respective theology and advances to corresponding behaviors.

These passages highlight the importance of biblical heart renewal, a new way of thinking that we find only in regeneration (James 1:18) and in sanctification (the rest of James). Effective BC focuses on the root heart beliefs and attitudes more than mere behavior. In BC the counselor must consistently look beyond the presenting problem to the root issues, that is, the unbiblical theological beliefs that drive the person’s sinful behaviors. The good news is that this kind of biblical change is exactly what God desires in His children as they walk in the Spirit. It is God’s specialty to change us from the inside out.

Dr. Bruce Meyer is professor of Bible and Biblical Counseling at Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin. Bruce and his wife, Kathy, have been married since 1987. They have four children and three grandchildren.



<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, biblical counseling will be abbreviated “BC.”

<sup>2</sup> Some of the possible reasons include proof texting rather than exposition, teaching but not training how to apply the truth, behaviorism (“stop it” methodology), dealing with surface issues only (presenting or “fruit” problems), impatience (wanting the quick fix), ritual over relationship, simplistic analysis and solutions, and others.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of BC, see Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> The Bible uses several words to describe the nonmaterial side of man: soul, spirit, heart, and mind. The biblical authors use the terms somewhat interchangeably at times.

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the temptation likely has a secondary appeal in that Jesus would be demonstrating His deity to those who witnessed His leap of faith.

# Sufficient Word— Even for Counseling

**W**e typically accept the Scriptures as sufficient for many of our everyday problems, but some believers equivocate when problems become more complex, especially if the label “mental illness” is in view. For those problems, many react as though there should be an asterisk that includes an exception clause. After all, people reason that “my *Strong’s Concordance* does not include the words ‘anorexia,’ ‘depression,’ or ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.’ Therefore, the Bible is silent concerning those problems. How could ancient authors know anything about these modern-day afflictions?”

## Common Questions

This issue depends upon two primary questions: (1) Whose authority *speaks* to these problems? (2) Whose authority is *reliable* for these problems?<sup>1</sup> The foundation of all biblical counseling is the Bible. There cannot be biblical counseling without *expositional* use of the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> In fact, as Baptists we rightly hold to the belief that the Bible is our sole rule of faith and practice. Therefore, what is the biblical basis for such a belief, even when we are dealing with complex problems that seem to be psychological in nature? *It is because of our belief in the sufficiency of the Scriptures (and the God who wrote them), that we believe they are sufficient in all realms of life, even in complex problem solving.*

## Because God Has Spoken: Sufficiency Is Based on the Inspiration of the Scriptures

One of the leading passages on the doctrine of inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:15–17. This passage teaches us three key truths about the Bible: clarity (“and that from a child,” v. 15), authority (“God-breathed” or “inspired,” v. 16), and sufficiency (“thoroughly furnished,” v. 17). The three terms are tied together not only textually but also functionally. Authority is lost to us if we do not understand the Bible (clarity). Authority diminishes if the Scriptures fail to address our daily living (sufficiency). Neither clarity nor sufficiency matters if the Bible lacks the authority to speak to our problems. The verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures means that we have the words of God that He desired to share with us in revealing truth for accomplishing His will in our lives (cf. Deut. 29:29). Because God breathed out the words of Scripture, these words carry his authority. Because these words carry the all-knowing character of God behind them, they are inerrant and sufficient for our daily needs, including complex problems. Grudem correctly notes, “The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the

words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us *for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.*”<sup>3</sup>

## Objections to Sufficiency

One of the common objections to sufficiency is the lack of intersection between psychological “disorders” and biblical theology. This seeming disjunction, however, is assumed rather than real. For example, one may object that the Bible is silent concerning problems such as anorexia nervosa, depression, cognitive dissonance, or other psychological constructs. Therefore, we need clinical psychology (science) to “fill in the gaps.” Such a belief, however, makes several faulty assumptions. First, the person assumes that science has the answers for these problems (authority). Second, there is the assumption that psychological answers are accurate (sufficiency), both in diagnosis of the problem and a prescription of a solution. Third, the person is assuming that until we had the aid of psychology, people did not really understand these kinds of problems.

If a person, however, knows both theology and people, he will recognize that God addresses the root issues of those problems in significant ways, even though the label does not appear in the Scriptures. For instance, one common underlying root issue of anorexia is the desire for control.<sup>4</sup> An understanding of the sovereignty of God helps an individual not only understand God, but also understand the need to trust God’s control over circumstances in specific and tangible ways. Naturally, if circumstances require a change (abuse in the home, for instance), we should make the effort biblically to confront and change the abuse through confrontation, repentance, and biblical renewal.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, a person struggling with anorexia usually has plenty of fears: fear of gaining weight, fear of becoming fat, fear of being unhealthy, and the like. The wise counselor will ask good questions that help in identifying these root beliefs and apply expositional teaching of Scripture to the root fears. He then trains the counselee how to practice the theology that alleviates her fears concerning food.

PTSD is not a new problem: history supports this claim. A survey of the psalms of lament shows that David struggled with the same modern-day symptoms that our military personnel experience. It is an old problem, since God did not design humans to experience the horrors of war (or the trauma of victims and first responders surrounding an accident scene). But our all-knowing God provides a robust theology in the Psalms that addresses such fears and stresses.



He not only provides calming words of assurance, but He provides the theological framework to strengthen a person's relationship with Himself in such circumstances. These solutions are not simplistic approaches but are real theology that speaks to both the heart of the issue and to the relationship the sufferer has with God.

Until the 1950s secular theorists did not have a clear understanding of cognitive dissonance—but God did. In Romans 7 Paul struggled with knowing truth and yet not practicing that truth. The Scriptures are filled with examples of people who knew to do right but failed in their beliefs to practice what is right. The solution is not a behavioral solution but a theological solution that a person must accept first in his belief system. God provides genuine solutions through the Scriptures and the work of the Spirit in Romans 8. The problem, therefore, is incorrect thinking and the solution is a renewed mind (Eph. 4:22–24; Rom. 12:2).

If God knows anthropology, then He is most qualified to speak concerning matters of the heart. If God is all-powerful, then He can find a way to inerrantly communicate with us concerning the solutions. If He is all-loving, then He would address those issues in His Word centuries before humans “discovered” those truths via scientific inquiry.

A second passage on the sufficiency of the Scriptures is 2 Peter 1:3–4. Here Peter writes,

According as his divine power hath given unto us *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust [emphasis mine].

This passage directly relates to the sanctification of the believer since Peter describes our daily growth process (vv. 3–7) and the results of our growth (vv. 8–11). The passage culminates in Peter's reminder that the prophetic word is certain because these words came from God, who used holy men to record them accurately (2 Pet. 1:19–21). This truth answers the second question of which authority is reliable. Because God is our Creator and Redeemer, He knows and understands our struggles and speaks truth to those struggles. Verses 3–4 remind us that God has supplied everything we need for obeying God in Christian growth (“life and godliness” and “partakers of the divine nature”) and in escaping the pollution of sin. Here a common objection is, “But there are things that psychology now understands that God did not reveal.”

For instance, the person might cite statistics about a problem or display brain scans of differences in brain functions or reference chemicals that are lacking with certain disorders. Those observations might clarify differences, but do they help in providing solutions? Psychology may provide descriptions that supply background and context, but none of those data help in providing solutions for the problem without an accurate understanding of the inner man and our relationship to God. This is where psychology fails—their prescriptions fail to supply real solutions that permanently heal the individual's spirit, since the problems we are addressing are spiritual in nature, not physical. Jesus taught us that the truth of the Word sanctifies us (John 17:17).

I have seen God's Word and Spirit change people with problems such as anorexia nervosa, self-injury, depression, panic attacks, and even abuse recovery. God perfects that person by changing him through salvation and sanctification. Through His Word, God addresses the heart issues underlying those problems and solves them theologically. The power of the Word penetrates deeply to the problems we face, offering real biblical change through biblical renewal in Christ. *It is because of our belief in the sufficiency of the Scriptures (and the God who wrote them), that we believe they are sufficient in all realms of life, even in complex problem solving.* It is the doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction of the Word that is sufficient to thoroughly furnish us unto all good works.

Bruce Meyer is professor of Bible and Biblical Counseling at Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin.



<sup>1</sup> There are other issues that are too lengthy for this article, such as what is mental illness, what is the nature of therapy, how do we define a biblical anthropology, and others.

<sup>2</sup> I use this term because biblical counseling is more than just offering advice that is biblical. It is the vigorous use of exposition to teach and train the individual concerning God's will. We should not equate simple proof-texting with biblical counseling, for biblical counseling is all about training the counselee to practice the truths of the Scriptures as James taught us (1:22–27).

<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 127 [emphasis added].

<sup>4</sup> There are too many other roots of these problems for an article this size. Further study in these problems will yield a better understanding for readers.

<sup>5</sup> Certainly, if actions in the home were criminal, it is essential that we include civil authorities.

# Counseling from the Pulpit

## The Sermon on the Mount as a Test Case

**C**ounseling works best in the context of life on life—individuals helping individuals or couples with personal struggles. But what about group counseling? Is there a place for counseling a group or congregation in the context of Bible teaching? In other words, can preaching accomplish the purpose of counseling? I anticipate some immediate objections. Counselors are not just teachers, they're listeners, which can't happen effectively in a group. Counselors who give one-size-fits-all solutions will probably give solutions that don't fit anyone well. While these are legitimate concerns, they can be answered, and must not be used to diminish the vital role of preaching.

I should also clarify that I am using the metaphor of the pulpit or the concept of preaching as representative of all legitimate

Bible teaching in the context of the local church and beyond. This could include men's or women's groups, teen groups, or congregations. God gifts pastors and teachers to instruct His people, and these individuals then have the privilege of bringing the truth of Scripture to bear in their lives.

There is no greater example of a preacher and counselor than Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Throughout His life and ministry He took time to instruct, help, comfort, and challenge people as individuals and groups. He taught His disciples one-on-one, in small groups, as "the twelve," and also in the context of much larger gatherings. One such gathering is Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5–7, where both the multitudes and His disciples came to hear Him teach. This sermon illustrates that counseling can be effectively employed

in the context of preaching, and it can also serve as a paradigm for preachers and teachers today who seek to help people truly change by the Spirit through the Word.

### **Good Preaching Is Insightful to Human Needs**

We will never know the stories of the people who gathered on a Galilean hillside to hear Jesus that day, but Jesus knew them. He knew their weaknesses and fears, their failures and wounds. He knew them, and He preached to their needs. Some of them were disciples, but all of them were humans that Jesus cared for.<sup>2</sup> In the three chapters that encompass Jesus' sermon, we can begin to sense the weight of issues represented in the crowd. Some were feeling the heaviness of persecution; others were engaged in spiritual battles in the areas of anger, lust, divorce, honesty, revenge, narcissism, anxiety, faithlessness, judgmentalism, and lawlessness.

Some might counter that preachers today could never duplicate the insight of Christ into the needs of these people. If the argument is based on the superiority of divine knowledge over our limited human knowledge, however, it would likewise undercut every other form of counseling. Could any human counselor ever hope to understand a person's needs like Jesus does? And yet Jesus calls leaders to feed His sheep (John 21:15–17; 1 Pet. 5:2), Paul encourages us that we can have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5), and we are reminded that it is the Word of God that is a discernor of the human heart (Heb. 4:12).

Insight into human needs takes a commitment to these realities. Preachers and teachers must strive to know the people they minister to, but that knowledge can never be absolute, and therefore must be supplemented by other knowledge—including the present challenges of the culture and the weaknesses common to humanity. Brian Chappell, author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, captures this concept well: "We ought to be able to look at people around us and we ought to be able to see Swiss cheese—they are incomplete. They have got holes in them. And what identifies Christian preaching is what we say is going to fill the holes."<sup>3</sup>

Human perception still has its limits, but the Lord knows every heart (Jer. 17:10) and has given the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as resources for discerning audience needs. I remember a vivid illustration of this truth while I was serving as a pastor. After my Sunday-morning sermon a large, rough-looking church member approached me with a scowl on his face. I greeted him with as much warmth as I could manage, but he immediately launched into an accusation. "Pastor, I can't believe you've been reading my mail!" His anger befuddled me, and I stammered out a defense that I didn't recall ever violating his privacy. As he witnessed my obvious distress, he broke into a big grin. "I'm just teasing you," he said with a laugh. "But your sermon today was so true to what's going on in my life that the only way you could know all that is if you've been reading my mail." We both had a good chuckle about my reaction, and then we had a great conversation about how insightful the Scripture is to our needs as humans.

### **Good Preaching Is Corrective of Harmful Thinking**

If preaching today can effectively connect with human needs, the next step is to offer genuine solutions. The threat—

that every preacher and teacher knows well—is preaching to alter behavior. Secular counseling techniques can at times tend toward behaviorism, and religious teaching has the same tendency. What Jesus modeled in His sermon, however, is an approach that targeted inner change as the priority. We see this in two primary ways.

First, Jesus emphasized conversion before reform. The crowd gathered to hear Jesus consisted of a variety of spiritual identities. Some were disciples of Jesus, some wanted Jesus without discipleship, some were religious Jews, and some were trying to become disciples through religion. If these divergent groups thought the solutions that Jesus offered could be reached regardless of their starting point, their effort would lead only to frustration. If the religious-minded heard the instruction to "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," they might interpret it as "the path to God is poverty." And if the Jesus-without-discipleship crowd heard the admonition to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," they might scoff that Jesus' solution was the trite advice to "pray more."

Jesus' solution to the different hearers is to clearly establish that the starting point of discipleship is conversion. He hints at this truth in His introduction with the language of new identity—"theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; "they shall obtain mercy"; "they shall see God"; "they shall be called the children of God"; and "great is your reward in heaven" (5:3–12). He then teaches that this spiritual identity is out of reach "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (5:20), and lest anyone thinks that is possible he adds, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (5:48). Warnings about hypocrites (6:5) and false prophets in sheep's clothing known by their fruit (7:15–16) demonstrate the insufficiency of external religion. Neither is it sufficient to simply acknowledge Christ as Lord or do mighty works of power (7:21–23). Jesus confirms that it is the person whom He personally knows who can truly benefit from the transformative counsel of His sermon. It is the wise man who hears Christ's sayings and obeys who is building his house upon a rock (7:24).

Second, Jesus emphasized inner reality over external rules. For generations many who claimed the name of the Lord had failed to rightly understand and apply the teachings of Scripture. Jesus calls them out by using the formula, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time" (5:21, 27, 33). This approach to the Torah still persisted in the first century, so Jesus addresses it by saying, "But I say unto you" (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). While some maintain that Jesus was adding to, amplifying, or correcting the Law, this section summarizes Jesus' intention to correct widely held wrong thinking about the Law. Each of the examples Jesus addresses were technically correct as to the wording, but not to the intent. Illegitimate anger was always wrong, lusting for another man's wife was always immoral, and the truths clarified about divorce, oaths, lowliness, and love for enemies were always the will of God. These implications were always present for God's people, now identified as the disciples of Jesus.

## Good Preaching Is Instrumental to Heart Change

Jesus introduces a unified theme in Matthew 6:19–33; while this selection takes only about two minutes to recite, most today would recognize it as a preaching unit, able to stand alone as its own sermon. In these fifteen verses we get a complete pattern of counseling from the pulpit.

This mini-sermon is bracketed by a single idea, beginning with a negative formulation—“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”—and concluding with a positive expression—“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” The big idea of the sermon is that believers must live for God and eternity and trust God to take care of their present needs. This is a big goal that requires radical life reorientation. This is reflective of the kind of change desired in ongoing one-on-one counseling or discipleship, but notice how it is effectively communicated in the context of preaching.

Jesus begins by touching upon the human need for security, but He flips the script. Earthly treasure—the normal source of human security—is insecure, whereas heavenly treasure is absolutely secure (vv. 19–20). He is skillfully reorienting His hearers to adopt a new way of thinking. He then gives two strategies to help with the needed mental change. First, He encourages obedience before feeling—“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 21). The more investment is made in the stock market of heaven, the more we are interested in the expansion of our investment.

Second, Jesus warns about light and dark perception and encourages a good eye that sees life through the lens of God’s Word—a biblical worldview. A bad eye describes the person who cannot see beyond this life, which marks him spiritually as “full of darkness” (vv. 22–23). Anticipating those who feel that both perspectives are valid in balance, Jesus clarifies, “No man can serve two masters” (v. 24). So far, Jesus has been perceptive of human needs and corrective of harmful thinking, but good preaching and counseling cannot stop at a new perspective—they must pursue change. Jesus transitions to much-needed life transformation with the purpose word “therefore” in verse 25.

“Exhortation” is a biblical word central to the concept of preaching and counseling. This word—*parakaleō* in the Greek—is used to describe Jesus’ preaching ministry in Luke 3:18 and is commanded for all preachers in 2 Timothy 4:2. It means to call to one’s side, to urge, appeal, or encourage.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the noun form of the word is used for the Holy Spirit in His role as the Comforter (John 14:26, et al.).

Jesus now exhorts His hearers to live for God and eternity and trust God to take care of their present needs. My purpose here is not to re-preach Jesus’ message but to show how He uses this preaching moment to counsel His hearers toward heart change. Jesus begins by using the voice of command to call His hearers not to be anxious about earthly provision (v. 25). Following up this call to change He gives

Beginning at the heart level, people should be exhorted to change through growing faith in and obedience to a God who knows them and cares.

three arguments, drawing His hearers in with questions, rhetorically asking and answering common thoughts about this new way of living. The first argument is the perspective that life is about more than survival, which God is in charge of anyway (vv. 25b–26). The next argument demonstrates that anxiety is ineffective and indicative of a lack of faith in God (vv. 27–30). And the final argument is that persistence in worry is the lot of unbelievers, but believers have a Heavenly Father who knows their needs and cares (vv. 31–32). With this final argument He

reiterates His theme from the sermon that true change like this is possible only for the converted. Jesus didn’t come to clean up the messy, He came to seek and to save the lost. With these arguments given, He then brings this exhortation home with a final appeal. As believers pursue God’s kingdom and righteousness with single-minded devotion, God will provide their needs in His wisdom much more effectively than worry ever could (vv. 33–34).

## Conclusion

Can preaching accomplish the purpose of counseling? In Jesus’ case, yes. His Sermon on the Mount demonstrates clearly that good preaching can and should effectively counsel diverse people. In order to follow Jesus’ example, however, good preaching must be insightful to human needs through personal relationships and reliance on God’s Word and the Holy Spirit; it must be corrective of the harmful thinking that change can happen without conversion or that external change is enough; and it must be instrumental to heart change. Beginning at the heart level, people should be exhorted to change through growing faith in and obedience to a God who knows them and cares. This is the heart of Christlike preaching, and it is a kind of counseling that should be brought to bear in the lives of God’s gathered people on a regular basis.

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<sup>1</sup> In Luke 4:18 Jesus describes His preaching ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,” and Isaiah 9:6 prophesies that Jesus “shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor.”

<sup>2</sup> A common theme in Matthew’s Gospel is Jesus’ compassion on the multitudes (9:36; 14:14; 15:32) and the people He ministered to (20:34).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Michael Duduit in “What is expository preaching? An interview with Bryan Chapell,” <https://www.preaching.com/articles/what-is-expository-preaching-an-interview-with-bryan-chapell/> (accessed March 15, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 765.

# Counseling Your Children (and Grandchildren)

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**W**e have to stop thinking that counseling is like some sort of technical psychological therapy that must be left to the professionals. Counseling is happening all the time, and many Christian counselors do not even recognize they are doing it. Teaching is discipling, and discipling is counseling. All parents counsel their children. The question is whether it is good counsel and on purpose, or if it is accidental and in error. Because this is true, properly counseling your children is part of your parental job description, and that responsibility never ends.

In January I lost my father to COVID-19. He has been my confidant and counselor all my adult life. Not long before he got sick, I called him to get his advice on a financial matter. Dad was always good at giving me very practical biblical counsel. He rarely told me exactly what I should do but was guided by the principles of Scripture and how those principles had worked out in his own life. However, the conversation was cut short when I got another call. It was one of my children calling me to ask for my counsel on some other urgent matter.

This is how life is supposed to work—one generation influencing the next for God's glory. The Christian family is the first and primary locus for effective Christian counseling, but it does not happen by accident.

## Keep the Conversation Going

*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).*

*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou*

*walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:7).*

Paul told us what we are supposed to do, and Moses told us how we are supposed to do it. Proper parenting includes restrictions, structure, and correction. Proverbs is clear on that, but when Moses wanted to emphasize the transfer of the faith from one generation to the next, he emphasized the need for an ongoing life conversation. It is not optional. It is a command of God. The lifelong conversation is about how the commands of God's Word apply to every area of life.

This requires creating a space for the conversation to occur. The best life lessons are often learned in very short conversations in natural moments in life. While the literary purpose of Moses' "lying down, rising up, in the house, by the way" is to say "in all times and places," we can contextualize the expression a little for our own purposes. You need to talk about important life lessons when your children get up and prepare for school in the morning, in those golden moments when you kiss them goodnight, when you are sitting together around the dinner table, and when you are in the car driving to soccer practice. Years ago, a little book entitled *The One-Minute Manager* (Blanchard and Johnson, William Morrow: 1982) gave me great insight into what this type of ongoing short counseling conversation might look like. It was not a Christian book by any means, but its principles effectively flesh out the Deuteronomy 6:7 principles.

You cannot take advantage of these moments if they are constantly occupied by other distractions. Learn to put away the devices and talk. Agree ahead of time that there are no-device zones.

As I grew up, we had a daily time set aside for more in-depth conversations—the evening meal. We started our meal with prayer and ended it with Bible reading and discussion. I do not know who taught my father to do this, but he led in this consistently throughout my formative years. Proverbs was the book we most often read together. Conversations about the application of the principles always accompanied the reading. Dad would ask the leading questions. "So, what do you do when..." or, "How should you respond when such-and-such happens?" He did not always have the answers, but when he did not, we searched them out as a family together.

## Communicate Outside of Conflict

Sadly, some parents and children communicate only in conflict. They completely ignore one another until some life issue becomes so exasperating to one or both that the conversation quickly gives way to conflict, and the conflict discourages all further conversation.

## Listen

*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him (Prov. 18:13).*

Teachers and parents often want to do all the talking, but listening is the real springboard to useful communication. When we do not listen, we end up answering questions that weren't being asked and ignoring questions that need to be answered. The answer to "why?" doesn't always have to be "because I said so." The "why?" that explodes in the middle of conflict

is worlds different from the "why?" that sincerely springs out of thoughtful conversation. Our children and grandchildren need to know the "why" about *everything* we believe and do. Our discomfort is often the result of the fact that we ourselves do not know the "why" to a lot of things we do. Facing that fact about ourselves is frustrating and embarrassing.

## Be Transparent

Stop being embarrassed. If you do not know the answer, admit it. Then find it. Makes sure it is a biblically supported answer. Too often we are quick to hand out instructions and advice to our children that are simply the result of our human rational thinking.

Be transparent about your own mistakes. As my father read through Proverbs in family devotions, he took the time to explain to us kids what "surety" was. "I wish I had known about these verses a few years ago," he said.

He then went on to tell about how he cosigned a loan for a friend (against my mother's cautions) and later had to pay the debt himself. Kids pay attention when their parents "tell on" themselves, and they never forget those stories either.

Parents fear that being transparent will end up with a future, "Well, *you* did it!" thrown back in their faces. Certainly, parents should be wise in when and what they say, but transparency is still a very effective teaching tool, in spite of that future danger.

## Remember the Rod Is for Rookies

I believe what the Bible says about the rod, but I also know that the rod is the most basic entry-level teaching tool. The rod will exasperate children if parents do not communicate clear expectations ahead of time. Its lessons will be forgotten if loving teaching does not follow. Eventually, the rod becomes ineffective. Maturing children need to receive more mature forms of teaching. Jesus modeled life-on-life discipleship with the Twelve, and that is what parents have the opportunity to do with their own children on a daily basis.

## Make the Big Transition from Parent/Authority to Parent/Counselor

No parent remains his child's authority figure forever. The goal is to gradually transition from parent/authority to parent/counselor. Baptists believe in the biblical doctrine of individual soul liberty (Rom. 14:1–5). Our kids must be convinced in their own minds, and they will have to obey God according to their own personal understanding of Scripture and the dictates of their own consciences. They will never rise to biblical maturity if all they do is what we tell them to do. Eventually we should take on the role of mentor, counselor, and example. Ideally this role will last throughout life. It means that we all will spend many more years in the counselor role to our children than in the authority role.

My father's active counseling role in my life ended in late January of 2021 as I watched him take his final breath, but his influence will continue as each succeeding generation in our family counsels the next.

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# The Ins and Outs of Repentance

In 2018 the New York State parole board released a series of statements from its members in an attempt to create greater transparency about its decisions. One member wrote, “I have three broad areas I want to know about when interviewing offenders: what do they understand about their offending and how and why it happened; what do they understand about what’s changed about themselves since they’ve been in prison; and what’s going to be different about the future? If they can help me understand those three things, that might be persuasive in me deciding to release them.”\* In other words, the member was not interested in a criminal’s remorse or emotion. He wanted more than feelings. Similarly, when it comes to repentance, God is not merely interested in an emotional display over sin. There is more to repentance than feelings.

Repentance is a difficult topic. It involves the heart which only God knows. It can describe conversion as well as restoration of fellowship after salvation. (This article addresses the restoration of fellowship after salvation.) There are also common misconceptions, such as “repentance is only an action” or “repentance demands tears.” If we do not understand repentance personally, how can we challenge a friend, church member, or family member to repent biblically? Rather than asking what repentance should look like in someone else, let us understand what repentance means for us by asking, “But what does the Bible say?”

The Bible has much to say about repentance in both the Old and New Testaments, but there are two key Old Testament passages on the topic: Psalm 51 and Joel 2:12–14. The principles taught in these passages are still applicable to us even though Israel’s relationship to God is different from a New Testament believer’s relationship to God. What do these passages tell us about repentance?

## **Repentance: Commanded, Relational, Internal, and External**

First, God commands repentance. Joel warned the people of the coming Day of the Lord (2:11) before giving them two clear commands to turn back to God (2:12–13). The approaching Day of the Lord demanded immediate repentance. Despite what our flesh may tell us, the appropriate time to repent is now because God commands it now. Refusal to deal with our

sin according to God’s commands is itself a sin. This creates an urgency to obey. Our flesh may say, “Clean up a little before you repent,” or, “Let some time pass since the last time you indulged in \_\_\_\_\_ so that you feel better going back to God.” The perfect time to repent may never come in our eyes, but the right time to repent is always now in God’s eyes.

Second, repentance is relational. Joel 2:12–13 expresses this truth through two phrases: “turn . . . to me” and “turn unto the LORD.” In Psalm 51, David knew that he had sinned against God and understood that sin had broken his relationship with God (v. 4). He understood that repentance included reconciliation with God. He desired a new heart so that he would not be cast away from God (51:10–11). Admitting and/or avoiding sin does not equal repentance. God is not interested in our conformity or agreement. God wants to be the object of our worship. We have not repented biblically if all we have done is stopped the outward expression of our sin. There are internal roots to our sin which demand a heart change.

Third, repentance is an internal change. David knew that his inward sin was the issue (“in the inward parts,” 51:6). In Joel, God expected Israel to “turn ye even to me with all your heart” and to “rend your heart, and not your garments” (2:12–13). The Hebrews viewed the heart as more than just the center of feelings—it also described the mind and represented who a man is at his core. In other words, if we must repent with all our heart, repentance cannot be hypocritical. Most of us are seasoned actors because our outward calm or cleanness often does not match our inward turmoil or sin. The rending of the heart conveys a drastic, internal change that is not easily undone, just like a torn garment is not easily made whole.

Fourth, repentance has external manifestations. It has a “look.” When we turn back to God with all our hearts, our outside will look different because the inside has changed. Joel lists three accompanying elements to repentance: fasting, weeping, and mourning. These descriptions are like a personal litmus test for biblical repentance.

Fasting includes more than abstaining from food. The Israelite who fasted set aside his normal routine because he had a pressing matter to pursue with God. It was a practical choice to pursue God. When God confronts us about sin, a literal fast may be appropriate because our lunch hour is our next free time to do business with God. At the very



least, repentance includes practical and schedule-altering choices to seek God. This may not include missing a meal, but it may mean something such as setting aside additional quiet time with God so that we can memorize or meditate on His Word. Confession without practical steps of seeking God should draw the genuineness of our repentance into question. Have we repented with all our heart if we do not make a practical change to seek God?

Weeping and mourning are closely related. Weeping depicts a sudden outburst of emotion, while mourning depicts a season or prolonged time of emotion. For example, Joseph wept when he revealed himself to his brothers (Gen. 45:2), but Joseph and his brothers mourned for seven days while burying Jacob (Gen. 50:10). One is more immediate, while the other is lasting. In the context of Joel 2, weeping is sorrow over sin. David does not mention weeping in Psalm 51, but his sorrow is clear as he admits his sin and pleads for the joy of forgiveness (51:2, 8). People express sorrow differently. Some burst into tears, while others drop their heads. Some cry out with their voice while others sit in silence. Is one more repentant than another? No. Repentance is not a spectrum. One either repents biblically or does not. How can we evaluate our sorrow over personal sin? We should ask, “Am I more concerned right now about the consequences of my actions or about the broken relationship with my God?” Our weeping is the sorrow or heart pain that we feel when we realize that we have sinned against the God of our salvation (Ps. 51:14).

Mourning refers to our attitude as we move forward in our relationship with God. Praise the Lord that He restores our joy and gladness when He forgives (Ps. 51:12), but we must still live with an awareness about all that just happened (our sin, repentance, and forgiveness). Mourning is our safeguard against spiritual ADHD. For example, my first-grade son suffers from this ailment. He may be in tears at one moment while I am talking through a behavior issue only to run into the next room laughing as soon as we are done. So much for serious contemplation! How often do we do the same thing with God? God deals with us, and we move on quickly without serious contemplation about what happened and how to avoid having it happen again. Our internal repentance (“with all your heart”) has external implications (fasting, weeping, mourning).

## Repentance: Motivated by God


Fifth, repentance is motivated by the character of God. Although Joel 2:11 warns about the coming Day of the Lord, the passage highlights God’s character as the motivation for repentance. “For” in the middle of Joel 2:13 means “because.” David demonstrated this same motivation when he pled for forgiveness “according to” God’s grace and steadfast love (Ps. 51:1). God’s character motivates genuine repentance. Consider the list of attributes in Joel 2:13. God gives His favor to the unworthy (“gracious”). God feels and responds to the pain of His people (“merciful” or compassionate). God acts patiently rather than irrationally or temperamentally (“slow to anger”). God abounds in steadfast love and kindness (“great kindness”). God shows compassion by turning from judgment (“repenteth him of the of evil”). (“Repenteth him of evil” means that God changes His course of action by stopping the calamity of judgment.) We ought to repent because God stands ready to forgive. This gives us great hope. Joel 2:14 talks about the hope of God’s blessing that comes after repentance. In context, this blessing was a removal of the previous consequences for sin (Joel 1:9, 13). Repentance does not guarantee the removal of consequences. God can forgive but still allow the natural fall out of sin. By His grace, He can also forgive and remove the consequences of sin. His character motivates our repentance.

After David repented and was restored by God, he desired to “teach transgressors [God’s] ways; and sinners shall be converted [turned or repented] unto thee” (Ps. 51:13). We must respond to God’s chastening and conviction in our own lives with biblical repentance that is immediate, relational, internal with external changes, and motivated by God’s character. Why? We cannot teach what we have not done. If we want to help restore others when they fall into sin (Gal. 6:1), we must practice what we preach by turning to God “with all your heart” whenever He reveals sin in our lives.

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\* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/29/were-not-swayed-by-emotion-parole-board-members-how-they-reach-decisions> (accessed 3/19/2019)



# Truth for Responding to Grief

**H**ow should a believer respond to grief? The topic is a daunting one, for every person experiences his own journey through it; that journey is shaped by an individual's personality, kind of loss, sin tendencies, and heart idols. In this article I seek to establish a basis for enduring grief in a godly way so that we do not waste the sovereignly appointed trials God intends to use for our growth in holiness.

## Testimony

Two years ago, when I was twenty-six years old, my wife of almost five years died suddenly and without warning. We had met in Bible college, and she helped me to hone my talents and callings in many areas of life as first a close friend, then as a girlfriend and fiancée, and finally as my wife; we married the day after I graduated. We continued to sharpen each

other both mentally and spiritually until the evening of February 14, 2019, when she collapsed after mentioning a pain in her chest; somewhere within the next two hours consisting of paramedics removing her from our home, an ambulance ride, and the hospital staff's failed attempts to resuscitate her, she passed from this life into the presence of her Lord.

I was shaken. I was torn by grief and in agony of spirit. I cried out with the psalmist and my Savior, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" I wrestled with spiritual doubts about the nature of the world, people, and God Himself. I agonized over my attempts to reconcile spiritual truth with the emotional pain that racked my physical body. I fought daily the urge to simply "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). There were marked steps in God's restoring me to Himself: first came dealing with my anger toward Him, followed by a choice to be thankful to Him even in loss, and finally the acceptance of His will as always being worth it, regardless of the pain I might experience. Little by little, stage by stage, I learned to be thankful to God for His blessings, even when they are tainted with death and loss.

## Definition

What I have just described for you is my experience of what is called "grief." It has been described in many ways at many times in terms of mental, physical, and spiritual perspectives. The fact of the matter is that, while there are many common denominators, each person has a unique experience. For some it is more emotional, for others more physical, and for still others it is primarily spiritual, although all sufferers must deal with each of these aspects of grief. Theologically, however, grief is what happens when images of God come into close, personal, painful contact with the extent and ramifications of the Fall on our lives; it is what happens when we are forced to stare face-to-face at the Curse.

Scripture doesn't use the technical term "grief," but it does use words that express the universal experience of the Curse on humanity. In describing his ministry as an apostle, Paul uses the terms "troubled," "perplexed," and "cast down" (2 Cor. 4:7-9). The psalmist's descriptions are picturesque, using such expressions as, "My soul is also sore vexed" (6:3), "I water my couch with my tears" (6:6), and, "My soul is cast down within me" (42:6). While the language and terminology have changed through the ages, the human experience of suffering has not, nor has the theological basis for it: suffering exists because sin exists. On that basis, I will present three truths that helped me deal with my grief correctly, and I hope they will be of encouragement to you.

## It's Okay Not to Be Okay

Grief is not a sign of weakness, wickedness, selfishness, sinfulness, or a lack of faith. Granted, it presents one with the possibility of choosing these responses to the trials of

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physical body.**

life, but essentially grief is the agreement of our souls with the truth of the brokenness that creation itself endures because of sin. When presented with such situations, the psalmists cried out to God with questions that many of us find uncomfortable: "Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" (10:1); "Why castest thou off my soul?" (88:14); "How long wilt thou forget me?" (13:1); "Why have you forgotten me?" (42:9); "Why hast thou forgotten me?" (43:2); "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever" (44:23). By inspiring and including the Psalms in Scripture, God is communicating that He welcomes such questions: "He remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14).

We live in a broken world. God created all things perfect and whole (Gen. 1:31), but ever since Adam and Eve chose

to reject God's authority as Creator, sin has reigned over our world, and with it, death (Rom. 5:14). It is an unavoidable fact that all humans must die because of Adam's sin (Heb. 9:27); God in His sovereignty manages exactly when that death occurs so that He may bring about the most good, but it must occur. Death is not a good thing. Rather, it is the ultimate affront to an image of God. It is "the last enemy" that Christ will destroy when He reigns eternally (1 Cor. 15:26). It should come as no surprise to us that, if the creation itself groans in agony under the Curse (Rom. 8:22), we as the specially made images of our Divine Creator feel the weight of that burden with greater acuteness (Rom. 8:23). This biblical background is essential to understanding both grief itself and its effects on humanity.

When we sorrow over pain, illness, and death, we are agreeing with the Son of God Himself; when we weep for the difficulties of this life, we become better acquainted with the "man of sorrows" who "[bore] our griefs" (Isa. 53:3-4); when we beg our Heavenly Father for the removal of great suffering that we cannot bear, we have as our companion our Lord and Brother with whom we are co-heirs of the kingdom (Matt. 26:39). When we cry out to God in confusion at His permitting tragic events, we do so hand-in-hand with the Author and Finisher of our faith: the Man, Christ Jesus (Heb. 5:7-8). After all, it was He who quoted the psalmist when he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22; Matt. 27:46). This psalm, a lament, echoes the cry of our souls for God to rectify the effects of sin, and it is through these desperate cries to our Father in heaven that we obey the command to "[cast] all [our] care upon him" (1 Pet. 5:7).

## Nobody Is Really Okay

All of us are experiencing the effects of the Fall in our lives; perhaps it is more acute at certain times for some than for others, but sin's disruptive tendrils extend into every inch of this world and its inhabitants. As mentioned before, grief is not inherently selfish, but it does present opportunity for

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## 2021

### June 14–16, 2021

FBFI Annual Fellowship  
Colonial Hills Baptist Church  
8140 Union Chapel Road  
Indianapolis, IN 46240

### July 26–28, 2021

Alaska Regional Fellowship  
Hamilton Acres Baptist Church  
138 Farewell Avenue  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
907.456.5995

### September 14, 2021

NYC Regional Fellowship  
Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11235

### October 4–5, 2021

Central Regional Fellowship  
Bethel Community Baptist Church  
1397 155th Street  
Fort Scott, KS 66701

### October 16, 2021

New England Regional Fellowship  
(Meeting with the New England  
Foundations Conference)  
Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Road  
Dover, NH 03820  
603.749.0762

## 2022

### March 14–17, 2022

South Regional Fellowship  
The Wilds Christian Camp  
1000 Wilds Ridge Road  
Brevard, NC 28712-7273

### April 4–6, 2022

Northwest Regional Fellowship  
Grace Baptist Church  
2731 Matson Road  
Victoria, BC V9B 4M5  
CANADA

## 2023

### March 6–8, 2023

South Regional Fellowship  
Keystone Baptist Church  
15 Keystone Lane  
Berryville, VA 22611

### April 23–24, 2023

Northwest Regional Fellowship  
Monroe Baptist Church  
1405 West Main Street  
Monroe, WA 98272



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# SOUND WORDS

## First Partaker

### Fear of Man—A Snare

*If the fear of the Lord be not on our spirits, to counterbalance the fear of men, we cannot avoid being ensnared in unfaithfulness* (Thomas Boston).<sup>1</sup>

Pastoral theology is a field crowded with titles. Many are helpful, though mediocre. Only a few can be legitimately classified as classics. Among the latter is a work that has stood the test now of almost two centuries: Charles Bridges' *The Christian Ministry*. I was first introduced to it as a sophomore in college and was constrained to give it more careful attention when parts of it were assigned as required reading for a seminary class. I'm fairly confident that there has not been a single year of ministry since, in which I've not resorted to it repeatedly for fresh encouragement. In the past I've said that if I were marooned on an island like Crusoe, and could have only a handful of titles, *The Christian Ministry* would be one. That's probably overstating its value to me, but it nevertheless reflects the height of my regard for it, due to long and continued use.

One of the chapters that I've read repeatedly falls into a major section that Bridges titled "Causes of Ministerial Inefficiency Connected with Our Personal Character." The entire section, made of ten chapters (over seventy-five pages), is classic all by itself. What in a minister's own life may account for his ministry, especially his preaching, being so ineffectual in changing men's and women's lives? Among the suggestions Bridges offers is a brief chapter on "The Fear of Man."

This past year has been extremely challenging for most pastors. The temptation to fear has dogged many. I trust that Bridges' chapter, lightly edited and slightly enlarged by my adding what I hope will be helpful details

here and there, may strengthen the courage of some brother whose heart may be failing him for fear.

#### "The Fear of Man"

What conscientious minister is not painfully reminded of the truth of the inspired aphorism, "The fear of man bringeth a snare?" (Proverbs 29:25). Perhaps no temptation is more specious in its character or more subtle and diversified in its operation. Its connection with worldly conformity is sufficiently evident from the recollection of its paralyzing influence upon ministerial boldness.

Bridges now introduces a quotation from Thomas Scott (1747–1821), who followed John Newton in the pastorate at Olney and later published a popular commentary on the entire English Bible. In order to frame Scott's quotation to more advantage, I'll include just a small window into his character. Before he died, his commentary had enjoyed nearly £200,000 in sales. Sadly, Scott himself was shamefully taken advantage of by his publisher. His strenuous labors of over two decades brought him nearly to bankruptcy. It's estimated that in the end his profit amounted only to something like £1000, if that. His *Life*, edited by his son, is laced through with references to the tremendous burdens of fatigue and poverty that he experienced in attempting year after year to satisfy his publisher's unbending deadlines and unreasonable demands. A sad story of a man of great personal industry and integrity.

What follows here is a slightly longer quotation from Scott than what Bridges includes. Scott is expressing the tremendous difficulty of ever being entirely free from this snare of the fear of man. Emphases are mine.

It is not every Christian, no, nor every good and pious Christian who can thus courageously act and undauntedly follow the dictates of conscience when friends, relations, and all those whom one has been used to reverence and love are of a contrary opinion; especially if the case be dubious and much may be

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

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said on both sides. **This is the last victory which the Christian gains.** He will master by that grace which is given of God, his own lusts and passions, and all manner of inward and outward temptations; he will be dead to the interests, pleasures and diversions of the world, and his affections will be earnestly set upon things above, long before he has mastered this fear of men.

Here I find my own deficiency, as much or more than in any other respect. And often I feel an inward timidity when about to preach upon an unpopular doctrine, or expose a foible which some one of my congregation whom I otherwise love and esteem, is remarkable for. And in every instance I feel the greatest reluctance to resign the good opinion or act contrary to the judgment of those for whom I have esteem.

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***But does our conscience clear us of a desire to follow our Master without taking up the daily cross? Are we not afraid of “being fools for Christ’s sake”? Do we not sometimes “become all things to all men,” when we ought to remember, that, “if we yet please men we cannot be the servants of Christ”?***

It is true, I am peculiarly bound to strive against this by reason of my Ministerial office. I am to speak boldly, not as a man pleaser, but as the servant of God: and therefore I endeavor to master all these fears, to act implicitly as my conscience suggests, without respect of persons. Conformity to others in things unchristian, the fear of man, a servile spirit of time serving, etc., are the faults of ministers and effectually hinder even those that desire it from performing the most important parts of their ministry, both in public preaching and by private application. **But this kind of spirit goeth not out but by a very spiritual and devout course of life. Indeed its expulsion is the gift of God, and is especially to be sought for from him.**<sup>2</sup>

In a footnote to these comments from Scott, Bridges included the confession of Samuel Walker. Walker was a leader in the evangelical awakening of the eighteenth century, one to whom even John Wesley looked for counsel on occasion. Evangelical Press issued his biography in 2002. In the quotation quoted by Bridges, Walker was writing to a friend who just had been ordained. For his friend’s forewarning, he’s sharing seven personal ministerial failures or temptations against which he himself has had to continually strive.

Again, the emphasis is mine.

Walker lamented his having

a most abominable fear of men’s faces, especially in personal conference. **I have been forced to fight every inch of my way against this,** and not without repeated advantage on its part, and a perpetual consciousness of not having acted up to duty. I have hardly courage to this day, in that private way, to act on the offensive.<sup>3</sup>

Bridges continues by describing how this slavish fear erodes *the forcefulness of preaching* (which he called “our public ministrations”).

Conviction of duty is often almost sacrificed to it. Subjects uncongenial to the taste and habits of influential men in our congregation are passed by . . . or touched with the tenderest scrupulosity, or expanded with wide and undefined generalities, so that the sermons, like letters put into the post office without a direction, are addressed to no one. No one owns them. No one feels any personal interest in their contents. Thus a minister under this deteriorating influence chiefly deals in general truths, devoid of particular application; more in what is pleasing than what is direct and useful. . . . There is thus a continual conflict between conscience and the world. I ought to speak for conscience sake, but I dare not speak for fear of the world. The offensive truth must be smoothed, disguised, and intermixed until it is attenuated into an insipid, pointless, and inoperative statement.

The spirit of cold refinement which gives occasion to this compromising ministration is one of the most baneful hindrances to our efficiency. Whether in or out of the Church it is the real spirit of the world.

Here another quotation follows. This time Bridges references Richard Cecil. Cecil was a London minister who was such a close friend of John Newton, that when the latter died in 1807, Cecil preached his funeral sermon and then wrote his friend’s first biography (republished by Christian Focus in 2000). Here is a fuller quotation of Cecil than Bridges included:

There is a manifest want of spiritual influence on the ministry of the present day. I feel it in my own case, and I see it in that of others. I am afraid that there is too much of a low, managing, contriving, maneuvering temper of mind among us. We are laying ourselves out, more than is expedient, to meet one man’s taste and another man’s prejudices. The Ministry is a grand and holy affair; and it should find in us a simple habit of spirit, and a holy but humble indifference to all consequences.<sup>4</sup>

## **Back to Bridges**

Our general ministration is also sore let [left undone] and hindered by this principle [of fearing

men's faces]. Indeed the subterfuges of cowardice and self-deception are endless when the wisdom of this world has begun to prevail against the simplicity of faith."

How seldom do the rich and poor share alike in the faithfulness of Ministerial reproof. How hard is it, instead of receiving honor one of another, to seek the honor that cometh from God only. How ready are we to listen to cautions from influential quarters against excessive zeal. How much more afraid are we of others going too far than of coming short ourselves of the full requisitions of the Scriptural standard!—sometimes preferring fellowship with our brethren of a lower standard, or even with the world, rather than with those whose ministry most distinctly bears the mark of the cross.

In how many cases of conviction is the light hid under a bushel or exhibited only to the friends of the Gospel. How many shrink from a witnessing a good confession, except under the shelter of some great name. How often are opportunities of usefulness neglected, and the endurance of afflictions in making full proof of our Ministry avoided, from the fear of the cross. **We cannot (we say) do all at once. We hope to gain our point by little and little. We dare not, therefore, by taking a bold step upon the impulse of the moment, close the avenues of distant and important advantage.**

But does our conscience clear us of a desire to follow our Master without taking up the daily cross? Are we not afraid of "being fools for Christ's sake"? Do we not sometimes "become all things to all men," when we ought to remember, that, "if we yet please men we cannot be the servants of Christ"?

Bridges again includes a convicting footnote, this time quoting John Knox's son-in-law, John Welch.

What! that I should regard or fear the face of any man, when I remember and assure myself that I am standing before that sacred and Glorious Majesty, whose word, in his very sight, I preaching to his servants and creatures! Believe me, when this thought enters my mind, I could not pay any regard to the face of an, even if I wished ever so much to do so.

It would be a great remission not to include here that Welch's boldness was undoubtedly due, in great part, to his prayer life. There are several stories of his prodigious labors in it.

Previous to his marriage, he boarded in the home of a man named Mitchelhill and shared a bedroom with a young boy. The boy's remembrance of Welch in prayer at night affected him until his dying day. He testified that Welch's custom was to lay out a Scots plaid over the bed clothes, so that when he went to his night prayers he could sit up and cover himself with it. The boy said that Welch *reckoned the day ill-spent if he stayed not seven or eight hours in prayer.*

Welch used to remark that he could not understand how a Christian could stay in bed all night without rising up to pray. During his pastorate at the village of Ayr, he would often walk to the church building and spend the entire night in prayer there, so that he could give full voice to his affections without being overheard or disturbed.

After his marriage to Elizabeth Knox, Welch would often get up in the night and go to another room to pray. One night he stayed so long that Elizabeth feared for him, as the rooms were very cold. She rose and went to the door, but felt restrained from opening it by over-hearing snatches of his praying. *Lord, wilt Thou not grant me Scotland?* After a pause, *Enough, Lord, enough.* Later

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***In this milieu, the letters of respected pastors often amounted to considerably more than casual correspondence. They were sometimes seasoned advice that might run to many pages in response to practical or theological questions posed by family, friends, church members, or even previously unknown friendly inquirers.***

she asked him what he meant by, *Enough*. Unhappy with her curiosity, he finally explained that he had been wrestling with the Lord for Scotland, but had come under the impression (which he took as being from the Lord) that a sad time was coming, yet that the Lord would be gracious to a remnant.

His greatest fear seems to have been the feeling of desertion in the pulpit. Occasionally he would send for his elders before he went to preach and ask them to pray for him because he found himself *sore deserted*. It was observed that their doing so was generally answered by his having a *flame of extraordinary assistance*.

Welch's fortifying himself in prayer proved to be critical to his steadfastness. In 1605 James VI (the King James of our Bibles) had various Scottish ministers arrested. One was John Welch. He was imprisoned in Edinburgh, and then in Blackness Castle. Finally he was banished to France for life. Undeterred, he began a ministry in the south of France which eventuated in sixteen years of fruitfulness. Once he had preached before the University of Saumur with such authority that one in attendance asked him afterwards how he could be so confident in the presence of strangers of *such quality*? Welch replied that he was so filled with the dread of God that he had no apprehensions of man at all.

When thinking of John Welch, one cannot help but also think of our Lord's words, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation* (Matt. 26:41): the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

We return to Bridges.

**Christian prudence indeed is most valuable in its own place, connection, and measure; and the want of it brings with it great inconvenience.** But except it be the exercise of faith, combined with boldness, and encircled with a warm atmosphere of Christian love, it will degenerate and become the time serving spirit of the world. “The fear of man” often assumes the name of prudence, while a worldly spirit of unbelief is the dominant, though disguised, principle.

But the fear of the professing church [by which Bridges means, not the church’s fear, but our fear of the church] is also a serious part of this temptation. . . . What further proof need we of the baneful influence of this temptation than the recollection of two Apostles beguiled for a short moment to deny the faith of the Gospel (Galatians 2:11–14). With me, said another Apostle to his people, whose determined resistance to the weakness of his brethren was the honored means of their restoration, “it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord” (I Corinthians 4:3). Indeed the want of singleness of aim obscures the work of grace in our own hearts; nor can we maintain our peace of mind, except we feel that we have but One to please. That One is our Master, even Christ. Nor is this supreme regard to our great Master less important, as insuring the success of our work. Where “the truth is imprisoned” (Greek text of Romans 1:18), if not in unrighteousness, yet in unbelief, there must be a want of power upon Ministration.

The direct violation of Christian integrity has a necessary tendency to enfeeble exertion by diverting our mind from that main object which should be always directing our whole time and energies, and compared with which every other object is utterly unimportant—the edification and salvation of our people. The voice of conscience and duty speaks with a weaker tone in a worldly atmosphere. The habits of self-indulgence are strengthened, and the exercises of self-denial proportionably diminished in frequency and effectiveness. Thus, as the heart is more in the world, it is less in our work; our duties are consequently performed with reluctance, and unproductive in their results.

Though we would by no means advocate indiscretion, yet well intentioned imprudence is far better than the frigid wisdom of this world. And it will invariably be found that those that act openly with an honest freedom, though they may probably commit mistakes, will be generally borne out and find their path ultimately smoothed, whereas the temporizing spirit that aims to please both God and man

will meet with disappointment from both. Where God is not honored, he will not honor. And in defect of becoming Christian boldness, our people, under the influence of our example, will sink into the same benumbed spirit, while their confidence in us will be materially weakened by the manifest evidence of our inefficiency and unfruitfulness.

No less than four times in a single verse does God warn his prophet against this besetting temptation (Ezekiel 2:6). At another time he threatens his timid messenger with utter confusion (Jeremiah 1:17). Yet let the servant of God gird himself with his Christian panoply, and he will find ample provision made for his complete success. Let him study more deeply the high dignity of his glorious Ministry (See II Corinthians 4:1). Let him seek to realize the presence of his heavenly Master, “walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks” (Revelation 1:13–20), to direct, invigorate, and uphold the angels of his Churches. Let him associate himself with those Ministers who are delivered from this degrading bondage, and “professing a good profession before many witnesses” (I Timothy 6:12). Let him call out his Christian principles into more uniform and active operation. The fear of God will subjugate the fear of man; and, however strong the confederacy, if he “sanctify the Lord of Hosts he will be a sanctuary to him” (Isaiah 8:12–14). Faith exercised in simplicity will bring to view an invisible and present God—a covering in the endurance of the cross, even from the wrath of the King (Hebrews 11:27). Thus, while “the fear of man bringeth a snare,” it is written—“whoso trusteth in the Lord shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25).

The hour may come when a minister is to be glorified (so to speak), in some fashion. Such as in the loss of his reputation, relationships, people’s goodwill, or his income. It is not necessarily carnal to be troubled in soul at the approach of such an hour (John 12:27). But shall a minister who is Christ’s true follower request to be saved from that hour? Should he not rather reflect upon our Lord’s words, *But for this cause came I unto this hour?* Should not his prayer be, *Father, glorify thy name* (John 12:28)?

*If any man serve Me*, said our Lord, *let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my father honour* (John 12:26). ☞

<sup>1</sup> “Godly Exercise Necessary to Make a Good Minister,” *Works*, IV, 77.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life, Letters, and Papers of the Late Rev. Thomas Scott, D.D.* (1827), 65–66.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life and Ministry of the Rev. Samuel Walker, B. A.* (1838), 453.

<sup>4</sup> *The Works of the Rev. Richard Cecil* (1847), III, 116.

# Bring . . . the Books

*Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Reader, are you presenting gospel application from the Old Testament to your church family? Personally, I can explain the text until I am blue in the face (or my listeners are), but how adept are we at seeing the main point that the Lord wants us to see in the Old Testament: Jesus Christ (Luke 24:25–27; John 5:46)? Since the Old Testament has one main point, Jesus Christ, how well do we present Him and His gospel from those passages? That can be somewhat difficult, can it not? Brother Pastor, do you present His good news passionately with ready application from Old Testament texts? Well, if you are as convicted as I am at these questions, there is a tremendous “how to do it” resource available that guides us through Old Testament passages with examples.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones is arguably the greatest English-speaking preacher of the twentieth century. His passion for preaching and reaching men’s consciences through precise exegesis, logic, and application is unparalleled. He pastored in his native Wales before becoming assistant pastor to George Campbell Morgan at Westminster Chapel in 1939. Morgan retired in 1943, and Lloyd-Jones became the pastor, serving until 1968. Many people who did not regularly attend church services would attend Sunday evening services in Great Britain in those days. (Today’s irregular attenders seem more likely to attend on Sunday mornings.) Lloyd-Jones knew his audience and took advantage of the opportunity to preach the gospel to them and to include Old Testament passages on many occasions. He tried, like Spurgeon, to acquaint his audience with their Old Testament as well as New and would often preach evangelistically from Old Testament texts. (If you are interested in some of his fine evangelistic New Testament sermons, I recommend *Evangelistic Sermons* published by the Banner of Truth Trust. His best sermons are found in the latter two-thirds of the book.)

*Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* begins with an introduction by Iain Murray titled “The Evangelistic Use of the Old Testament in the Preaching of Dr. Lloyd-Jones.” This twenty-six-page introduction is both biographical and beneficial for our applicational use in presenting the gospel from the Old Testament.

The book contains twenty-one evangelistic sermons: four from the Pentateuch, eight from the historical books, three from poetry (two of which are from the Book of Job), five sermons from the major prophets, and one sermon from the post-exilic minor prophet, Zechariah.

There are two sermons from 2 Kings 5:1–16 dealing with Naaman: sin is the leprous disease that no man can cure, but Jesus’ good news runs completely contrary to natural man’s thinking. After reading Lloyd-Jones, I will always see Jesus’ gospel clearly emblazoned in that narrative.

There are two sermons from Genesis 32:22–32 dealing with Jacob’s wrestling with the Angel of the Lord (cf. Hos. 12:4). These two sermons, combined with Alexander Maclaren’s message on the same passage, have recently provided a solid basis for two evangelistic messages for our congregation.

Just a warning here: those who do not see this passage as being Jacob’s conversion might find themselves a little irked with the interpretation. Lloyd-Jones mentions how Jacob was mostly concerned about Esau as the most important problem in his life, but then he rightly brings up the point about Jacob’s personal relationship with Christ. Quoting from these sermons: “The problem of man . . . is not Esau—it’s God Himself. The gospel . . . reminds us . . . that unless and until man is right with God at the center, he cannot be right anywhere else. God, not Esau!”

As you read these sermons, you will see examples of how to use the Old Testament legitimately and effectively to point to Jesus Christ and also to plead and apply His gospel upon the consciences of those who do not know Christ as Savior. I desire to be more evangelistic in my preaching application than to merely take for granted that all within the congregation genuinely know the Lord. Like Spurgeon, I desire that no matter what the text, to make a beeline for Christ and His cross. While I recognize that I am not as effective as I desire to be, I find that the more I hang around people who present Christ well from the Old Testament, the more I find my thoughts thinking similarly along the lines of the gospel in the Law and the Prophets.

*Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* will challenge your application of the Old Testament to the people to whom you minister. You will be impassioned with the truth and moved to an even closer relationship with the Christ whom Lloyd-Jones unveils from the Old Testament.

A couple of critiques are offered here, although the thought of critiquing Lloyd-Jones makes me want to put my hand over my mouth as Job did (Job 40:4). In a few of the passages, the points seem stretched. Also, it would be helpful if the editors of these sermons would shorten the text paragraphs and divide them into Lloyd-Jones’s obvious flow of thought: explanation of the text, explanation of the point he is making, argumentation, application, etc. These are minor critiques, however.

I recommend these sermons for your personal encouragement and edification as you prepare gospel messages from the Old Testament. ☞

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

Aaron Young pastors First Baptist Church of Gallipolis, Ohio.

The New Testament’s use of the Old Testament is one of the most fascinating areas of biblical studies, especially when the biblical author appears to refer to the OT in an unusual way. For example, Matthew says of Jesus, “And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23)—literally a *Nazorean*, someone from the city of Nazareth.

The problem with this “fulfillment” passage is that there is no OT text stating that Jesus would come from Nazareth. In fact, the city of Nazareth is never even mentioned in the OT, and archaeological evidence suggests that the area of Nazareth may not have even been occupied during the time of the writing prophets. How, then, can Matthew state that prophecy is actually “fulfilled” by Jesus’ settling in Nazareth?

The linguistic key that helps us to solve this puzzle is the unique wording of Matthew’s “fulfillment formula” in the original Greek language. The other nine times Matthew says that an incident in the life or death of Jesus “fulfills” OT prophecy, Matthew consistently says that something happened that “it might be fulfilled” which “was spoken” through “the prophet” (1:22; 2:15; 13:35; 21:4) or through “Jeremiah” (or “Jeremy,” 2:17; 27:9) or through “Isaiah” (or “Esaias,” 4:14; 8:17; 12:17), “saying . . .” But in 2:23 alone Matthew attributes the fulfillment to the “prophets” (plural) and instead of using the strong word “saying” (*legontos*), he ends the formula with a simple “that” (*hoti*). The verse literally reads, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets that a Nazorean he shall be called.”

By using the plural “prophets” and by using the word “that” rather than the usual “saying,” Matthew indicates that he is not quoting an actual specific prophecy. Rather, he is calling attention to something that several prophets said about the coming Messiah in general. So, to what prophetic theme does Matthew refer?

One view says that Matthew is probably playing on the name “Nazareth” and the Hebrew word *nāzîr*, which means “consecration.” This word is also directly related to “Nazirite,” a Jewish person who takes a special vow of purity in order to dedicate himself to God (Num. 6:1–21). Though there is no evidence in the Gospels that Jesus ever followed the Nazirite vow, some have suggested that Matthew is referring to OT passages that describe this high level of consecration and applying it to Jesus (cf. Judges 13:7; 16:17; Amos 2:11–12).

Others say that Matthew is probably playing on a different Hebrew word, the word for “branch” (*nēsēʾr*). Among three OT prophets, the Branch is the Lord’s

Servant (Zech. 3:8) who will come from “the stem of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1) and spring up as a “righteous Branch” to reign (Jer. 23:5), “beautiful and glorious” (Isa. 4:2).

There is certainly much to commend either of these solutions. However, the problem with both wordplay views is that they make Jesus’ settling in Nazareth merely a touch of irony. There is nothing about the place where Jesus settled that would actually bring to fulfillment either His consecration or His prophetic identity as the Branch. These solutions also raise a question about whether the wordplay would be too subtle, whether Matthew’s readers would have even appreciated his allusion.

A more satisfying solution, therefore, lies in the fact that the city of Nazareth was viewed as nonimportant, obscure, even unpleasant. This attitude toward the city explains Nathanael’s response in John 1:46, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” In those days, to be referred to as a *Nazorean* was to be associated with the lowly and forgotten of society. Perhaps, then, Matthew is referring to Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah as “despised and rejected” (Isa. 53:2–3) and to Zechariah’s depiction of the Messiah as a lowly figure people will reject, who will ultimately be struck down by God (Zech. 9:9–10; 11:4–14; 12:10; 13:7).

This view explains why Jesus’s hailing from Nazareth would actually “fulfill” what the prophets said. It also fits with Matthew’s statement that Jesus shall be “called” a Nazarene, for Jesus became known among His many designations as a person from the lowly city of Nazareth. People commonly referred to him by this city throughout his life (e.g., Matt 21:11; 26:71; Mark 1:24; 10:47). Pilate’s inscription reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19). After His resurrection, Jesus continues to be known as one from Nazareth (Mark 16:6; Luke 24:19); He is described in this way in the preaching of the apostles (Acts 2:22; 4:10; 26:9), and, in fact, He describes *Himself* as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 22:8). Furthermore, the followers of Jesus were also implicated by association with the lowly city of Nazareth. In Acts 24:5, Paul’s accusers call Him derisively, “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

Of course, Matthew’s fulfillment passage is not merely geographical, but theological. Jesus was the exalted Son of God, but everything about His first coming showed Him to be a humble servant (Phil. 2:5–8). He was willing to be known as a Nazarene—someone the world forgot or rejected. In fact, it was *necessary* that he be a “Nazarene” so that through His suffering He could bring to glory other Nazareans, like us, who embrace Him (Heb. 2:10). ☞

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

# Windows

## Windows for Serving in Sickness: Pastoring in a Pandemic

Our kiddos often hold their breath when we drive through a tunnel. As of this writing, I feel a bit like that myself. I'm ready to breathe a sigh of relief and see the light at the end of the tunnel of this pandemic. But here in NYC, it's still just around the bend. I'm saying this year what I said last year: "Maybe by Easter."

We were hit hard, especially last year. We are a subway stop from the hospital that was on national news every day. One of our men is a doctor in another hard-hit hospital in Queens, and what he shared with me was serious. Many who came in fairly healthy died, and died quickly.

Perhaps I've struggled with this more than you. Maybe your tunnel is some other type of sickness or struggle. In either case, the Lord has encouraged me this year with others who ministered when sickness abounded. In their situations, sickness abounded much more than ours. And yet grace abounded more.

### C. H. Spurgeon—Ministering as an Immortal

Charles Spurgeon was not yet twenty when he hit London like a tornado, with all the youthful passion of faith in the gospel and his calling to proclaim it. What endeared him to his community in those first months? No doubt his gifts and abilities, but also his energy and compassion while ministering during an epidemic. And it nearly killed him.

If you were to ask me what times Spurgeon walked through the valley of the shadow of death, I would immediately think about the Surrey Garden Music Hall balcony collapsing. Or perhaps his lifelong fight with gout. Spurgeon might also remind you of his first year in London: a raging "Asiatic Cholera" crushed his neighborhood. During this period he went to the graveside almost daily—while visiting the sick and dying day and night.

At first, I gave myself up with youthful ardor to the visitation of the sick and was sent for from all corners of the district by persons of all ranks and religions, but soon I became weary in body, and sick at heart. My friends seemed falling one by one, and I felt or fancied that I was sickening like those around me. A little more work and weeping would have laid me low among the rest (*Autobiography*, 272).

During the darkest part of this storm, when he felt he was being crushed under the load, he happened upon a billboard that a local businessman had hung in his shop window.

For you have made the , my refuge,  
Even the Most High, your dwelling place.  
No evil will befall you,  
Nor will any plague come near your tent  
(Psalm 91:9–10).

"The effect upon my heart was immediate," Spurgeon writes. "Faith appropriated the passage as her own. I felt secure, refreshed, and girt with immortality" (272).

Immortality. That's a great word to remember when serving during danger. That's true, right? In one sense, we can visit the sick in a battlefield filled with hidden land mines. And we can walk forward swiftly with sure footing, knowing that the Lord has called us. We minister as immortal until the Lord is done with us.

Another brief lesson I gleaned from glancing into this window: in Spurgeon's two-volume autobiography—which fills 1100 pages—only three pages cover this trial. When we look back on these last twelve months, we will, most likely, feel that same way. "COVID, I remember that. The Lord sure gave grace." And it'll be about .003 filler for our life's pages. This will be the way you think back on your current trial as well.

### Fanny Crosby—Serving with Spiritual Sight

Fanny Crosby came as close to death as Spurgeon. It was five or six years prior to Spurgeon's fight in London, so it was not the exact pandemic that he dealt with. But it was the same timeframe in the medical world, when pandemics hit cities hard. This one swept across the whole world. She found herself in another metro area, New York City, serving during a pandemic.

Picture her. Young Frances is a little older than Charles; she is a teacher in her twenties working in a boarding school in what is now the Chelsea area near 9th Avenue. She describes vividly their waiting for the epidemic to reach them.

The little town of Jessore where it first began may be termed merely the place where the terrible disease gathered its hosts, before starting out to overrun the world on this particular campaign. . . . Before it left England, it had taken 70,000 lives.

It is a problem, and, no doubt, always will be, among physicians, and other scientists, as to how much the matter of fear has to do with the incurring of epidemic diseases, but one thing is certain: New York and its kindred American cities stood, for months, in dread of the terrible visitation, and tremblingly expected it from day to day" (*Fanny Crosby's Life Story, Autobiography of a Christian Poet, Lyricist and Mission Worker Blind from Infancy*, 36–37).

As you know, young Fanny is also blind. But she sees the shadow of the disease crossing the globe better

*"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"*

*Charles Spurgeon*

than those who see. She also remembers the sounds of that deadly summer for the rest of her long life: "I shall never forget the terrors of that summer. The harsh cry of the truckman, 'Bring out your dead!' sometimes rings in my head to this day" (38).

What struck me about Crosby's story was that they had to remove Fanny from her labors among the sick. Blind or not, pandemic or not, she will minister compassionately to those in need. I see the young teacher walking along with the funeral procession to Trinity Church, perhaps touching the casket to guide herself, as the crowd takes the first of several dead from the boarding house.

A young girl had just called Fanny to her bedside. "Miss Crosby, I am going home, and I just wanted to bid you good-bye and tell you I love you. Now lay me down again" (*Fanny Crosby's Memories of Eighty Years*, 92).

Her ministry was not remote. "If we could get our patient into a state of perspiration, there was hope; and we used to rub them vigorously with salt in order to accomplish this" (*Fanny Crosby's Life Story*, 38).

Her trust was in the Lord who healed the sick. And the Lord brought her through. "We, of course, had our fears. But we were taught that the same Friend above, that had been so merciful thus far, would not desert us now. That He would do all things best for us, both in this world and the next" (*ibid.*, 37).

Fanny teaches us that we don't have to be the most fit to be the most fitting to serve in difficult times. She shows that a heart of compassion is what God wants in His ministers. Servants with hearts of compassion, like Jesus, touch the leper in his sickness. After all, love is the mark of the true follower of Jesus. And, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus" (M'Cheyne).

## Robert Murray M'Cheyne—A Ministry unto Death

Robert Murray M'Cheyne was one such pastor. His passion for holiness and Christ's kingdom has become an example to every generation since he labored in Scotland in the early 1800s. Like Fanny, M'Cheyne fought his bout with an epidemic when in his twenties. We find him finishing his ministry about the time Spurgeon began his.

Even while young, his passion for Christ called him to minister far from his own flock. And yet this extensive traveling did not take away his burden for the people in his own village. He saw them as Christ did.

As I was walking in the fields, the thought came over me with almost overwhelming power, that every one of my flock must soon be in heaven or hell. O how I wished that I had a tongue like thunder, that I might make all hear; or that I had a frame like iron, that I might visit everyone, and say, "Escape for thy life!" Ah, sinners! You little know how I fear that you will lay the blame of your damnation at my door (Andrew Bonar, *Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, 172).

Following one of his times abroad, he returned to visit his parish from house to house. Although in good health, he was drained from travel and ministry.

During the next twelve days, he was to be found going out and in among his people, filling up, as his manner was, every inch of time. But he had been much weakened by his unceasing exertions when in the north, and so was more than ordinarily exposed to the typhus fever that was then prevailing in his parish, several cases of which he visited in his enfeebled state (*ibid.*, 186–87).

He preached two more Sundays, under the sickness, but died within a month.

In M'Cheyne we find the lesson of faithfulness while dying. Even in the closing days of "delirium," his weak voice would gain strength as he cried out in prayer or in counsel to his flock from his sick bed. "This parish, Lord, this people, this whole place!" He died in this fever, finishing out his last days of ministry in prayer (*ibid.*, 189–90).

In M'Cheyne we are also reminded of God's sovereignty in sickness. He died. As we minister to the sick, we are immortal until God is done with us. He will be through with you and with me one day. A pastor nearby in Queens died from COVID; others continue to serve.

One final lesson from M'Cheyne's deathbed: God allows His people to die in peace. Listen to his dying hope (albeit suffering under fever): "My soul is escaped, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and I am escaped." His countenance, as he said this, bespoke inward peace. Ever after he was observed to be happy" (*ibid.*, 189).

## Spurgeon—Faithful to the Finish

Spurgeon shares this same lesson from the epidemic in London. He was called to the bedside of one man who scoffed at him and his gospel preaching before he was sick. And yet when death's cold hand came to grab him, he cried repeatedly for Spurgeon to visit. But it was too late. "Promptly as I had responded to his call, what could I do but look at his corpse, and mourn over a lost soul" (*Autobiography*, 274).

From there, Spurgeon was called to the bedside of a young lady from his church. "She was singing—though she knew she was dying—and talking to those around about her, telling brothers and sisters to follow her to Heaven, bidding good-bye to her father, and all the while smiling as if it had been her marriage day. She was happy and blessed. I never saw more conspicuously in my life, than I did that morning, the difference there is between one who feareth God and one who feareth Him not" (*ibid.*).

Here we find our greatest lesson. Let us minister the gospel faithfully as dying men to dying people. We do not know which will be our last day to spread this blessed gospel. Certainly we owe our Lord that much. ☞

Tim Richmond pastors Grace Baptist Church in Forest Hills, New York.

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## Truth for Responding to Grief

Continued from page 19

selfish thoughts and actions. Because of the nature of suffering and our natural human response to it, grief tends to turn us inward. That inward gaze is not wrong; God intends for suffering to lead us to reevaluate ourselves in light of His truth (James 1:5). The danger is that if we are not vigilant, that inward gaze can turn selfish.

One of Scripture's key passages dealing with the believer's response to suffering is 2 Corinthians 1:3–11; this passage makes it clear that, instead of making them selfish, the experience of grief should lead believers to serve others. Here, the apostle Paul tells the church in Corinth that God—the source of all comfort—comforts us in trials so that we can in turn offer that same comfort to others. In the context Paul is speaking of how his sufferings as an apostle have led to the comfort of the Corinthians, for his preaching ministry, which was fraught with suffering, brought about their initial conversion as well as their sanctification through subsequent trials.

The principle is that suffering equips followers of Christ to be better servants. No better example exists than that of our Lord who, being equal with, God became a servant to redeem His fallen images via the ignoble death of a criminal (Phil. 2:5–9); who, on the very night of His betrayal by his friend, debased Himself by washing that betrayer's feet (John 13:1–5); who, in the agony of his physical body during his torturous execution and the incomparable spiritual torment as God's wrath was poured out upon Him as He bore the sins of all mankind, took time to see to His mother's care (John 19:26–27). "Let this mind be in you" (Phil. 2:5)—don't waste your grief; use it to serve others.

### God Will Make Everything Okay

But there is hope. The comfort we are commanded to share with others is not a wishy-washy, emotional well-wishing;

it is shared confidence in our good God's sovereign control over suffering, death, and sin.

First, our Savior is present with us in all our trials, both to encourage us (2 Cor. 1:3–4) and to use the fire to sanctify us (James 1:2–4). Our labor has eternal significance (Rom. 8:18), and it will bring about praise from our Lord (1 Cor. 4:5). Suffering exists because of sin, but God in His sovereignty can use that suffering to bring about His good plan (Rom. 8:28). We serve the same Yahweh whom Joseph came to know, who was present with Him in all of the injustice he endured, about which Joseph concluded near the end of His days: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Second, our suffering is temporary; this "light affliction" is "but for a moment" when seen from the perspective of eternity (2 Cor. 4:17–18). Suffering exists because sin exists, but God will one day do away with sin. In His time the Savior of our souls—our Lord Jesus Christ—will not only redeem our physical bodies (1 Cor. 15:50–55) but also the very earth itself; He will remove all trace of sin's taint from it (Rom. 8:20–21). After the Deceiver is finally dealt with, the new heaven and the new earth will be the perfect, eternal home of every believer, where "the tabernacle [or "dwelling place"] of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3).

This is the truth to which Paul refers when he tells the church at Thessalonica, "Comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18), and it is the belief (faith) and confidence (hope) in these truths that result in a godly attitude (joy), which evidences itself in service to others (love), and when all of these are present in the life of a believer, he is truly whole (peace).

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# The North Star Truth

## Psalm 37: A Believer's Response to a Confusing World

Living as a Christian in this world affords many moments of disorientation. Sometimes the world seems to be a stormy ocean, and the believer is a weary sailor struggling to keep his coordinates set. For thousands of years sailors have used stars for navigation, particularly the North Star, because they are fixed, reliable points of light that guarantee a certain direction no matter what the sailor feels to be right. As a seafarer can be reoriented by a fixed point in the night sky, believers can be reoriented by contemplating the “fixed points” in Scripture.

Psalm 37 is one of those fixed points that offers direction for the believer in a world of confusion. “The object of the poem is to reassure men whose minds are disturbed by the fact of the frequent prosperity of the wicked, to convince them that in every case retribution will overtake the ungodly man at the last, and to impress upon them that the condition of the righteous, even when they suffer, is far preferable to that of the wicked, whatever prosperity they may enjoy.”<sup>1</sup> This psalm provides steady, consistent truth for those who may be disoriented by what they see and hear in the world. *God sees and knows the righteous and the wicked, and He will reward them accordingly in His divine timing and providence.* This “North Star Truth” requires three responses from the believer: A response toward the wicked, a response toward God, and a response toward himself.

### Response Toward the Wicked

Psalm 37:1–2 sets the context and guides a believer's response toward the wicked. King David surely had seen the apparent prosperity of Saul, Ahithophel, and Absalom, yet he also saw their swift demise and destruction. To David, their prosperity compared to his own mistreatment, abuse, and disrespect must have seemed unfair at times. Yet he writes under inspiration, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.” Christians are to respond to wicked people by refusing the impulse to fret about them and by rejecting the temptation to envy them.

The command to not fret literally means to not get heated. The word itself emphasizes the idea of being kindled. It could say, “Do not kindle yourself.” Often believers become obsessed with the unfairness of wicked people and their wicked deeds that are given a pass in the culture. Spurgeon said, “To fret is to worry, to have the heartburn, to fume, to become vexed. Nature is apt to kindle a fire of jealousy

when it sees lawbreakers riding on horses, and obedient subjects walking in the mire.”<sup>2</sup> While frustration may be a natural response, calmness is the spiritual response toward wickedness. Like David, a believer must remember that God knows and sees all, and He is a just judge.

An even more dangerous response to wickedness, however, is envy. God warns against it here because it is actually possible for a believer to see the ease and prosperity of wicked people and desire them for himself no matter what he has to sacrifice. The psalmist is emphatic, though: “Neither be thou envious.” “This verb expresses a very strong emotion whereby some quality or possession of the object is desired by the subject. . . . It may prove helpful to think of ‘zeal’ as the original sense from which derived the notions ‘zeal for another's property’ = ‘envy’ and ‘zeal for one's own property’ = ‘jealousy.’”<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 3:31 says, “Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.” Proverbs 24:1 says, “Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.”

Though it is natural for a believer to experience strong emotions when he believes that the wicked are prospering, his focus must be on the consistent truth that in God's timing and providence, wickedness will be rewarded accordingly (Ps. 73:3–14; Job 21:7–15; Jer. 12:1–2). Instead of becoming disoriented by the emotional responses of fretting and envy toward the wicked, Christians must “cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not . . . in any wise to do evil” (Ps. 37:8).

### Response Toward God

During difficult times of misunderstanding, mistreatment, and misdirection, there is a temptation to respond toward God in bitterness and resentment. David's inspired words in Psalm 37 motivate a sincere, spiritual response toward God. “An obsession with enemies and rivals cannot be simply switched off, but it can be ousted by a new focus of attention.”<sup>4</sup> He uses four phrases that include the covenant-keeping name of God.

“*Trust in the Lord*” (Ps. 37:3). This command exhorts the believer to have an *intentional focus on the Lord*. The verb “trust” carries the sense of security which comes when one has something or someone in whom to place their confidence. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this Hebrew word is always translated “hope” rather than “believe.” It means to intentionally focus on God for your safety and security. The word stresses the feeling of being safe.



*"Delight thyself also in the Lord" (Ps. 37:4).* This second command of response toward God inspires a *redirected joy toward God*. In his *Treasury of David* Spurgeon writes,

Make Jehovah the joy and rejoicing of thy spirit. Bad men delight in carnal objects . . . look thou to thy better delight, and fill thyself to the full with thy more sublime portion. There is no room for fretting when we remember that God is ours, but there is every incentive to sacred enjoyment of the most elevated and ecstatic kind. Every name, attribute, word, or deed of Jehovah should be delightful to us, and in meditating thereon our soul should be glad.<sup>5</sup>

The pleasures provided by the temporal things of this world will be transient. True joy is the Christian's overwhelming delight in who God is and what God has done, not the absence of conflict or heartache.

*"Commit Thy Way unto the Lord" (Ps. 37:5).* The word "commit" conveys the idea of rolling an object off of oneself and onto another. This command implores all believers to rely on God and to get a *necessary relief from Him*. Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee." Times of disorientation compel believers to get help from God and rely on Him for strength. Horatius Bonar expressed this idea well in his hymn "Thy Way, Not Mine, O Lord."

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,  
However dark it be;  
O lead me by thine own right hand,  
Choose out the path for me.  
Smooth let it be or rough,  
It will be still the best;  
Winding or straight, it matters not,  
It leads me to thy rest.  
I dare not choose my lot,  
I would not if I might;  
But choose Thou for me, O my God,  
So shall I walk aright.  
Take thou my cup, and it  
With joy or sorrow fill;  
As ever best to thee may seem,  
Choose thou my good and ill.

*"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7).* "Resting" helps the believer to respond not in an angry

outburst, but rather in quiet meditation and a *persistent security in the Lord*. The verb "rest" means to be silent. Often in times of crisis, calamity, or general confusion, believers are tempted to erupt in anger. But those moments should actually be opportunities to quietly mediate on the Lord and *His* ability to control each situation. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God."

A Christian living in a confusing world should respond to God by an intentional focus on Him, a redirected joy in Him, a necessary relief from Him, and a persistent security in Him. As he responds scripturally to the wicked and to God, there will be a natural evaluation of himself and how he is living.

## Response Toward Self

A maturing believer who is aware of the wickedness around him may be tempted to focus only on the hope of the wicked being "cut down like the grass" and "[withering] as the green herb." While those promises do offer stability, the psalmist is not done! Psalm 37 continues with a list of positive exhortations for those who long for righteousness to be working on.

*Do Good (Ps. 37:3, 27).* Twice in this psalm the writer presses this responsibility of the righteous. A commitment to moral uprightness must be present, especially in times of uncertainty. Galatians 6:9 challenges believers to "not be weary in well doing." This moral uprightness is seen in how believers treat their enemies, in how they respect their authority, in how they serve other people, and in how they hate and depart from evil.

*Cultivate Faithfulness (Ps. 37:3).* This Hebrew phrase can be translated, "Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." Faithfulness is steadiness, consistency, and reliability. While the world is fluctuating and fickle, the believer must strive for faithfulness.

*Show generosity (Ps. 37:21, 26).* The challenge to God's people is to continue to be merciful and generous even when it is easier to complain that life is unfair. A believer's mercy and generosity toward others is not based on the worthiness of their object, just as God's mercy and generosity toward sinners is (fortunately) not based on the worthiness of *their* object. Because *God* has been generous in His mercy toward believers, believers must be generous in turn.

Continued on page 28



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# Regional Reports

**Doug Wright**

## South Regional Fellowship

COVID continues to have an impact on events, but the South Regional Fellowship (March 1–3, 2021) proved to be an outlier. The meeting was well attended and was a wonderful opportunity to fellowship, learn, and enjoy the hospitality of Berean Baptist Church in Lilburn, Georgia. Tony and Karen Facenda, Pastor Todd Sivnksty, and the people at Berean Baptist were exceptional hosts. They provided not only a wonderful facility but also both lunch and evening meals along with snacks.

The Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” This verse in 2 Corinthians 12:9 emerged often as we examined “The Power and Portrait of God’s Grace” (“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work,” 2 Cor. 9:8) The meeting opened on Monday night with a general session dealing with saving grace. Tuesday continued our theme with

both general sessions and workshops relating to the objective of having grace-filled marriages, responses, ministry, and even social media. Our general session speakers, Gordon Dickson and Les Ollila, took us through the merits of saving grace, sanctifying grace, sustaining grace, and satisfying grace. The general session speakers along with our workshop speakers exceeded our expectations as we considered how grace affects our ministry.

Lord willing, the next regional meeting will be at the Wilds Christian Camp in Brevard, North Carolina, March 14–17, 2022.



## Northwest Regional Fellowship

This year’s FBFI Northwest Regional Fellowship was held at Westside Baptist Church in Eugene, Oregon, March 8–9, 2021. Many old-time pastors and friends were not able to make it this year due to COVID, but several new friends came and joined us for a wonderful conference. Ken Endean and his son, Kristopher, did a wonderful job with the theme: “Mentoring.” The messages were outstanding, and a round-table discussion helped answer important questions regarding raising up godly leaders for the future. The videos are posted on our Facebook page, FBFI Northwest. The food and fellowship were outstanding. This year’s conference

was a bit different, with the meeting ending at supper on Tuesday rather than a later service. This gave many from Oregon the opportunity to head home after a packed day. The days went by quickly, and we are looking forward to next year with Dr. Ken Collier speaking at our host church, Grace Baptist of Victoria, British Columbia. Next year’s theme will be on the family and includes some extra days to enjoy the island.



## The North Star Truth

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**Depart from Evil (Ps. 37:27).** The need for Christians to disdain sin has never been greater than it is today. Instead of envying wickedness, the believer should hate it enough to leave it behind, to part ways from it. Psalm 37 is only one of many places in Scripture where this concept is found. Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil.” Amos 5:15 says, “Hate the evil, and love the good.” Romans 12:9 says, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” Believers must never give up the fight against sin and must never give in to evil.

**Speak Truth (Ps. 37:30–31).** The righteous person is one who “speaketh wisdom” because “the law of his God is in his heart.” Only by meditating on the fixed point of God’s Word and applying it to every part of his life will the believer have stability and confidence in a culture that is against God. The lies of the world will become more and more apparent and avoidable to this kind of a person.

**Keep His Way (Ps. 37:34).** This is a call for the believer to remain obedient to all of God’s commands and principles. The simple children’s song “Obedience” sums that word up well: “Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.”

The theme of Psalm 37 is that God sees and knows the righteous and the wicked and will reward each accordingly in His divine timing and providence. When a believer’s response to the wicked, to God, and to himself is right in light of that truth, God promises some wonderful blessings—giving the obedient believer the desires of his heart (v. 4), guarding his righteous reputation (v. 6), and blessing and protecting him (vv. 11, 22, 29, 34). He also promises to

give him “riches” (v. 16), to uphold him (v. 17), to give him lasting reward (v. 18), to order his steps (v. 23), to provide what he needs (v. 25), to preserve him (v. 28), to give stability to his life (v. 31), to be his strength in time of trouble (v. 39), and to help and deliver him (v. 40).

These are precious promises of God to those who understand and live in the truths of Psalm 37. The assurance that “there hath not failed one word of all his good promise” (1 Kings 8:56) should spur believers to strive for a godly response to wickedness and an obedient heart to God. God will not fail the righteous, and God’s justice demands retribution for the wicked. The responsibility of every believer is not to try figure out all the perceived injustices of this wicked world, but rather to respond with an eternal perspective to the “North Star Truth” that God really is in control!

Mark Herbster is dean of College of Bible and Church Ministries and Seminary at Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin.



<sup>1</sup> H.D.M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Psalms*, vol. 1, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 285.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 170.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, “2038 𐤀𐤓𐤕,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 802.

<sup>4</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 167.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 170.



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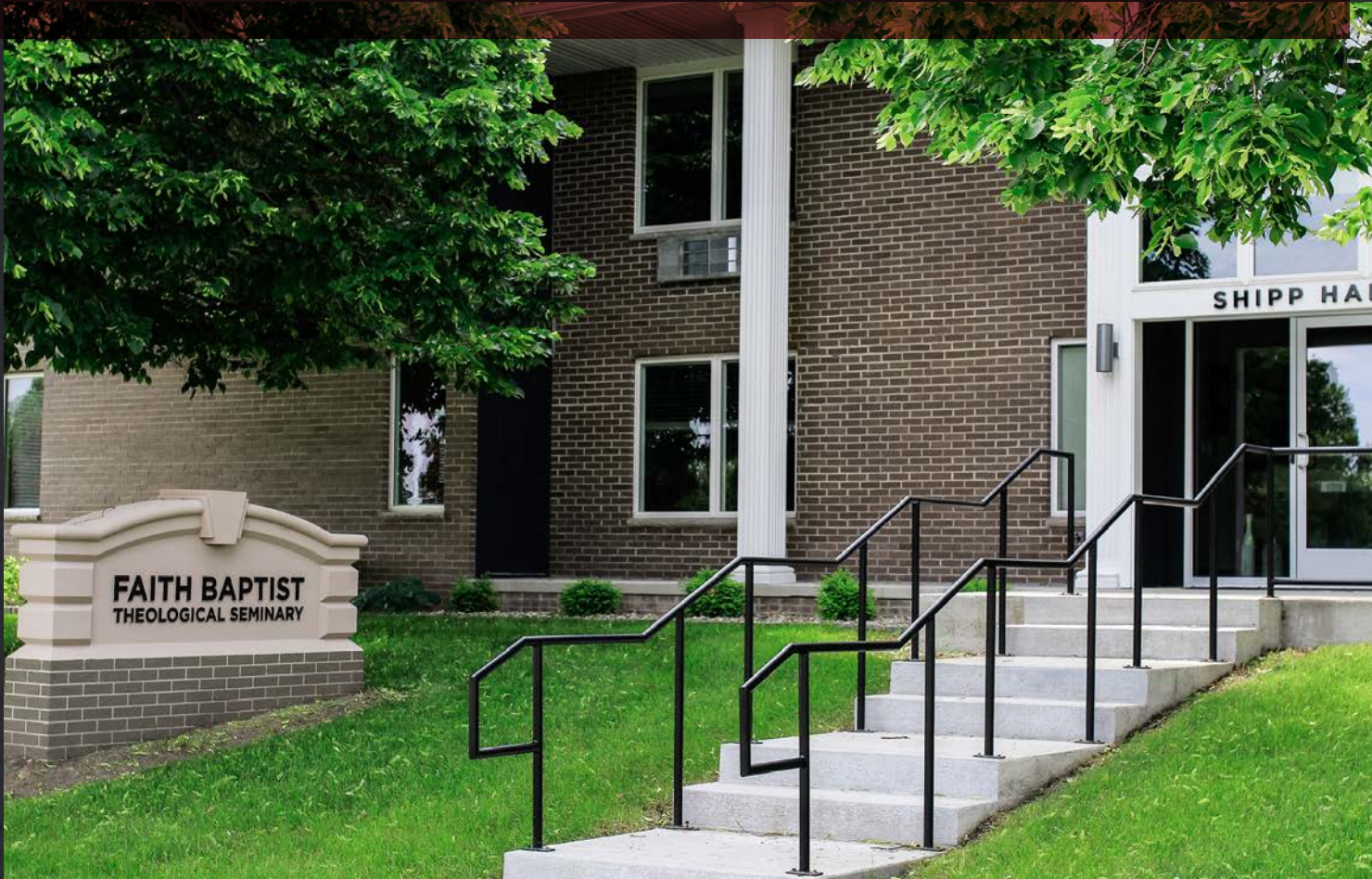
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Layton Talbert

## Prophetic Fulfillment:

Some regard the correlation between prophecy and fulfillment to be, on occasion, somewhat imprecise. Are God's words entirely reliable, or mostly reliable? Is mostly reliable good enough? This column explores two OT examples in which, at first glance, the fulfillment does not seem to match the details of the prophecy.

### The Death of King Ahab

God told Ahab that dogs would lick up his blood "in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth" (1 Kings 21:17–19)—i.e., in Jezreel, where Naboth died at the hands of Jezebel (1 Kings 21:1–16). The fulfillment, however, specifies that the canine component of this prophecy occurred "in Samaria" (1 Kings 22:38). Robert Chisholm, an evangelical commentator, concedes "the inexact nature of the fulfillment" but argues that the prophecy was nevertheless essentially fulfilled. "God's sovereignty and justice won out in the end" because the bottom line was accomplished (Ahab's death). But what about God's omniscience? His integrity? His reliability? According to Chisholm, the prophecy's imprecision merely accommodates human freedom. God permitted the soldiers to take Ahab's body to Samaria, since God knew there were dogs there too: "We see from this case that God makes room for human freedom in the outworking of even irrevocable prophecy. This means that some of the details of the prophecy may not be fulfilled exactly, yet the prophecy is realized in its essence."<sup>1</sup>

This explanation is defective in several ways. The location specified in the prophecy is not just a minor detail. The cities of Jezreel and Samaria are twenty-five miles apart—close, but is close good enough when it comes to the prediction of an allegedly omniscient God?

Chisholm's interpretation makes room for human freedom but at the expense of divine freedom and divine integrity. If an omniscient God decides to include specific details in a prophecy, those details are neither negotiable nor disposable. God could have foretold the place *or* the dogs; He need not have included both, or either. But if He chooses to include details that turn out to be essentially inaccurate, the result is not an essentially accurate fulfillment but an allegedly omniscient God who overcommits Himself and is, in the end, simply mistaken.

If God knows the future, then he knew where the dogs would lick up Ahab's blood. Why, then, would include in the prophecy what He *knew* to be erroneous information?

Why would God knowingly mis-predict the location when He could have either given the "correct" location by virtue of his omniscience, or simply omitted any reference to location and left the place entirely up to human freedom?

Finally, the solution to this apparent discrepancy is remarkably simple and feasible. All the information needed to unravel the alleged tangle between 21:19 and 22:38 is in 21:1—along with a rudimentary knowledge of geography. "Samaria" was not only the name of a city but also the name of the region over which Ahab ruled. The Lord told Elijah to go meet Ahab, "[who] is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth" (21:18). We know from 21:1 that Naboth's vineyard is not in the *city* of Samaria but in the city of Jezreel, which is in the *region* of Samaria. So according to 21:18, Ahab is simultaneously in Jezreel (the city) *and* in Samaria (the region). Since the Samaria in the prophecy (21:18–19) is the region of Samaria, not the city of Samaria, then the Samaria in the prophecy's fulfillment (22:38) must also be the region, not the city, of Samaria.

We also know that Ahab had a palace in Jezreel, which archaeological excavations indicate was "Ahab's chariot center."<sup>2</sup> Jezreel was also closer to the scene of the battle (Ramoth-Gilead) than the city of Samaria, so the most natural place for the soldiers to bring Ahab's bloodied chariot after the battle would have been his palace at Jezreel "in Samaria" (22:37–38). The reference to "the pool of Samaria" in 22:38 may literally be read "a pool of [in] Samaria" (NKJV, NIV). The spring at Jezreel was, in fact, a substantial fountain (1 Sam. 29:1) which further accommodates the understanding that the chariot was cleaned (with canine assistance) at the very place where Ahab condoned the murder of Naboth so the king could have a personal playground—Jezreel, "in Samaria."

You cannot sever the prophecy from its setting. In the very *place* and *moment* of Ahab's gross abuse of power (1 Kings 21:1–16) God sent Elijah with a specific and detailed prophecy (1 Kings 21:17–19) dripping with irony: "Right here, where dogs licked up Naboth's blood because of you, dogs will lick up your blood because of me." God got it exactly right, details and all. He does not operate on the principle that close enough is good enough. He does not need to.

### The Death of King Josiah

God pronounced desolation on Judah because of their rebellion (2 Kings 22:16–17, 19), but promised the godly

# Is Close Enough Good Enough?

young King Josiah (22:19), “thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace” (22:20). Yet, Josiah died in battle at the hand of Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt (23:29-30). How can that be explained as dying “in peace”? Again, the same commentator explains,

if we view the prophecy as implicitly conditional to begin with and make room for human freedom in the equation, we can conclude that Josiah’s decision to become embroiled in international politics compromised God’s intention for him to die in peace.<sup>3</sup>

Again, there is a problem with this explanation, however well-intentioned it may be. The notion that “in peace” must obviously mean that Josiah would die a natural death is a groundless assumption. When God promised Josiah that he would enter his grave “in peace,” He explained exactly what He meant in the very next phrase: “thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place” (22:20). We must allow God to define the terms of His own prophecies, and not impose our ideas of what we think He must mean or what we think the fulfillment must look like. Here, “in peace” specifically means that Josiah would die before God began bringing final calamity on Judah for their wickedness.

Judah was doomed to humiliation and destruction but Josiah did not see it. He died in 609 at the age of 39 (22:1), while Judah was still at peace. Within just four years, however, the prophesied calamity on Judah began in 605 with a first wave of captives into Babylon, followed by another in 597, and culminating in the final captivity and razing of Jerusalem in 586. If Josiah *had* died a natural death, the prophecy would not have been fulfilled.

Chisholm actually argues in two directions, on the one hand denying that Josiah went to his grave “in peace” and, on the other, conceding that the prophecy was *essentially* fulfilled since “Josiah still went to his grave without having to see Jerusalem’s downfall, which was the main point made by Huldah.” That was not merely the main point of the prophecy; it was the *whole* point of the prophecy. If 22:20b has *anything* to do with the accuracy of the prophecy’s fulfillment, it has *everything* to do with it.

When Pharaoh Necho II set out to aid the flagging Assyrians in their last stand against the Babylonians at Carchemish in 609, Josiah—for unexplained reasons—set out to intercept him (2 Chron. 35:20). Chisholm faults “Josiah’s decision to become embroiled in international politics.” But

that’s what kings do: international politics. Especially when their nation sits (like Judah) at the intersection between major international powers.

Nevertheless, there is a *possibility* that God providentially permitted and used Josiah’s disobedience to a word from the Lord to facilitate the fulfillment of the prophecy. When Josiah challenged the passage of Pharaoh Necho’s army, the Egyptian king sent messengers to call on Josiah to stand down: “for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not” (2 Chron. 35:21). We might be surprised, even suspicious, to hear God’s words coming from an Egyptian pharaoh. Maybe Josiah was suspicious as well. But it’s not so easy to get around the Chronicler’s own explanation in the next verse. Josiah refused to yield, disguised himself, went into battle, “and hearkened not unto the words of Necho *from the mouth of God*” (2 Chron. 35:22). Nothing in the text suggests that the Egyptian’s warning was false or disingenuous. In any case, none of this impinges on the original prophecy or its fulfillment in exact accordance with the precise terms God spelled out in the prophecy itself. Even though he died in battle, Josiah died “in peace” *because* he did not live to see God’s judgment on his nation—just like God promised.

## Conclusion

Many interpreters warn against pressing the details of prophecy, lest it crumble like a fragile ancient archeological artifact. In my experience, however, the harder one presses the details of prophecy from an omniscient and trustworthy God, the firmer one finds them to be. God does not need us to cover for Him; He wants us to trust His perfections—and pay more attention to the text.

<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “Israel According to the Prophets” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014.) As a whole, this is an excellent collection of essays from a variety of dispensational interpreters.

<sup>2</sup> J. Woodhead, “Jezreel,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996.)

<sup>3</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53/3 (September 2010): 570.

## The God of Hope

*Jim Tillotson*

The phone rang, and the news given when I answered stopped me in my tracks. “Pastor Jim, I was just informed that my wife was killed in a car accident. I was working out of town, and will be home in two hours. Can you be there when I get home?” Two hours to contemplate what I would say to this new Christian who had just lost his wife due to a head-on collision caused by the other driver, who was high on drugs.

A middle-aged man who had been a faithful member of our church asked to meet me. When we sat down, he informed me that he had been having an affair and wanted to get right with God and his wife. He asked if I would come over the following night as he broke the news to his wife. One day to contemplate what I would say to a wife who was going to hear some of the most devastating news in her life.

The phone rang at 2:00 AM. When I answered, a man was yelling and demanding that I come over. In my half-asleep state I assumed the man had called a wrong number. When I asked who it was, I realized I did know the man. He asked me to come over immediately as he and his wife were totally falling apart. I had twenty minutes to contemplate what I would say to this couple as I drove over to their home.

The point is that we all, at some point, will be asked for help or advice, and the situation will require us to give good counsel. What do you say in those moments? In each of the above situations, whether I had twenty minutes or a day to contemplate what I would say, I was struck by the desperate need of the individuals and the incredible hope and power of the gospel. Second Peter 1:2–3 describes this power: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” “The God of hope” (Rom. 15:13) has given us the Bible to give comfort, hope, and direction for every issue that we and others face. If we are going to be a help to those around us, we must be men and women who are daily reading and studying God’s Word. Second Timothy 3:16–17 informs us that the Bible shows us how we can know that we are going to heaven; it tells us what is right, what is wrong, how to get right, and how to stay right. It tells us how to be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (On a side note, when we are aware of a tough situation but counsel has not been

asked for, we just need to give lots of love and grace. When people are desperate enough to ask for help, we need to personally know the God of hope and point others to Him.)

People do not need our opinions when they ask for advice; they need to hear from God’s Word. True biblical counsel shows how the Word of God brings hope and healing to each situation—God Himself brings hope and healing to every situation. Praise God, nothing is too hard for Him. We can’t say with certainty why something is happening (as in the first example above). God may have multiple reasons. What we need to do is remind them about who God is and how much He cares for them. We must keep pointing them to Scripture. A friend of mine, Ben Hartwig, gave this advice when helping hurting people.

1. Show up. Sometimes in our uncertainty of not knowing how to help others who are suffering, we keep at a distance. One of the most important things for us to do is to show up—to be there for them during their difficult time. Call them, text them, visit them, send them a card. Let them know that you are praying for them. In a world of loneliness and shallow relationships, people need others to show up and show that they care.
2. Give people time and space to talk. Listen. When Job’s friends first arrived, they sat in silence (Job 2:11–13). They listened; they grieved with him.
3. Share truth appropriately. Sometimes truth is shared casually or flippantly. Casually saying “Just remember Romans 8:28” is usually not helpful. Truth shared appropriately will guide believers to walking with the Lord in the dark times of life.

I believe all of us will have moments when those around us ask for advice. May we be able to give an answer of the hope that lies within us. May we give hope and help from the only infallible instruction manual for life. May we take the Word of God to the world.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June of 2015. He was the senior pastor of Meadowlands Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, for eighteen years. During his time in Canada, he led Meadowlands Baptist in planting three new churches and helped begin a Christian school and a small Bible institute.

# I Didn't Plan It This Way!

I'm an organizer. My administrative skill set is a big part of who I am. Spontaneity is not my strong suit. When you're married and have kids, doing things "on the fly" elbows its way into your life, whether you want it to or not. So when our single daughter came to us back in 2019 with the news that she was expecting a child, I had a decision to make. With my mind reeling in that moment, would I trust the grounding truth that God could work it out "for good" (Rom. 8:28)?

My discovery in answer to this question was that this life requires so much more prayer and walking in the Spirit than we ever imagine we need . . . until we round a bend and meet a challenge face to face. In situations like these, which act as a match to light the bonfire of my emotions ablaze, I have to step back and gain perspective. It was clear to me that our daughter felt the weight of shame and isolation that bearing this heavy news was pressing upon her. To "lose it" helps no one. And honestly, to "lose it" is more about me anyway. It's about hurt, disappointment, the consciousness of the opinion of others, the dashing of our Perfect Parent aspirations. I'm grateful that God calmed and kept my heart so that what issued out was grace (Prov. 4:23). That's not something you can scrape together in thirty seconds. It comes from His weaving eternal, unchanging truth into the fabric of who we are. I've always admired women whose words were full of Bible truth. I have asked God to help me do that for years. Long years. Hard years full of hard things I'd never have chosen, but which served to make me lean hard on Him and recognize His voice. I've still got a far piece to go on that journey. Our daughter, Erin, needed a safe place for her heart, and I'm so grateful, by God's grace, that I could provide that.

For Erin, this has been a sort of epiphany. It brought into focus for her the struggles of her heart through the past several years and turned it back toward her Savior. When she posted her announcement (<http://bit.ly/Erinstestimony>), I was so proud of her courage and how well she

articulated her feelings and wove them together with relevant scriptural truth. We received so many responses, assuring us of love and prayers and support. I also received numerous private messages from friends who said they were so grateful we allowed them into this story. If the past several years have taught me anything, it's that trials come into our lives for the sake of others who are looking on—as well as for what God wants to accomplish in us personally (2 Cor. 1:3–4). We need to ask Him for the strength and bravery to embrace that and not hide away in a corner. Satan wants to paralyze us. God determines to empower us. So many are hoping for someone to show them how to live victoriously and "gracefully." So now we try together to offer hope on this new road while we're simultaneously trying to figure out what it's supposed to look like from day to day.

Walking this new road with God means that each challenge can bring us into a more abundant, growing, leaning, trusting, victorious life. The "good" in Romans 8:28–29 means to be conformed, molded, and changed into the image of the Lord Jesus. To become more like Him. He is a God of abounding hope, joy, and peace (Rom. 15:13). I see these things developing in our daughter's life as she leans on her great God. Her road has been a demanding one, but still a very sweet one.

C. H. Spurgeon once wrote, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." You may feel tempest tossed. It may seem as if your plans have been turned upside-down. But God, our Rock, is never surprised. Whatever your trial is today, you can embrace it as a friend. Erin and I can testify that there is such blessing, grace, and many good gifts in store when we do.

Diane Heeney lives in wild, wonderful Wyoming with her husband and youngest daughter, Katie. She works as Advertising and Sales Team facilitator and writer for *The Old Schoolhouse* magazine. Diane has a love for ministering to ladies and has done so via her "Quiet Rest" podcast and blog. She also speaks for ladies' retreats and Bible studies.



# MASH Ministries

## Hope Begins Here

### Challenges Faced through Deployment

May 1, 2003, is a date that changed my life forever. That was the day that my unit left Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and deployed to Iraq. Over the span of the next eighteen months our unit would face a myriad of challenges that still impact my life today.

One challenge was the length of our deployment. We were initially told we would be deployed for about nine months, but that was not the case. On one occasion our unit had packed up everything to return home, boarded the plane to leave, and had pulled away from the gate only to return to the gate to deboard and have to go back into combat again. This was hard on our unit and loved ones at home. Families were excitedly making plans to receive their loved ones only to be heartbroken and devastated at the news that it would now be several more months before we would be returning. We finally arrived home after an eighteen-month deployment in Iraq.

Another challenge was the type of missions we performed. Because we were conducting missions that were responsible for trying to flush the enemy out into the open, we found ourselves at risk and often in the middle of serious firefights. That was often made worse by the fact that we were constantly running short on food, water, and, more importantly, sleep. These three shortages took a toll on us physically, emotionally, and

mentally. Sadly, the first female National Guard soldier to die in battle was part of our unit. She died the day after we were told we were to return home. At this time, our company had received twenty-seven purple hearts for combat injuries.

The circumstances that we faced while in Iraq played a huge part in the challenges that I now face every day. All the emotions from the challenges already mentioned added to seeing how the Iraqis were treat-



ed, and the amount of death that I saw while being deployed was overwhelming.

### Life after Iraq

Upon returning home from Iraq, I attempted to get back to “normal” pre-deployment life. Little did I know that I was facing the challenges of PTS (Post Traumatic Stress). Flashbacks of Iraq began to haunt my dreams. Shortly after the struggles of the flashbacks, the nightmares started to keep me from sleeping at night. At this point, I began to pull away from friends and family and would only go to work and class. There were many times where I would just



sit in my car and cry out to God and feel as though I was not being heard. After realizing that I needed help, I went to the VA (Veterans Affairs) only to be greeted with a two-year waiting list to get help and a handful of drugs to take while waiting for that help.

I began to seek counsel from a pastor friend during this two-year waiting period. It was here that he showed and explained to me how to pray through the Psalms. As I began to pray through the Psalms, I began to realize that the battle of PTS was not mine but God's. The pathway to victory through PTS was learning how to hand it all over to God. I began to understand what the phrase "my strength is made perfect in weakness" truly means. God gave me the desire to want to help others who are struggling with some of the same challenges that I was facing as I began to see victory through PTS.

### Using Post Traumatic Stress to Help Others

During the time of going back to school to pursue how to help others with the challenges of PTS, the Lord led my wife and me to start MASH Ministries. MASH Ministries received its 501c3 nonprofit status in 2015 and is based in Westfield, Indiana. MASH Ministries is focused on restoring wholeness in the lives of veterans, first responders, and others who are struggling with the effects of PTS. While the terms PTS and PTSD are widely used and recognized, MASH Ministries encourages the term PTSI (Post Traumatic Stress Injury). We believe that PTSI is an internal injury that can

be healed. MASH's sole purpose is to show those who are struggling with PTSI that there is hope and that hope begins with Christ and having that relationship with Him. MASH Ministries focuses on PTS support groups, conferences and retreats, and crisis counseling. For more information on MASH Ministries, please visit [www.mashministries.org](http://www.mashministries.org).

Paul Phelps II serves as the Director and Founder of MASH Ministries and as an FBFI chaplain who ministers to those struggling with the effects of PTSI. Paul received his master's in Biblical Counseling from Maranatha Baptist University and his MBA from Herzing University. Paul medically retired in 2013 from the military after nearly twenty years. Paul and his wife, Sarah, have four daughters. For more information about MASH Ministries and to learn how MASH Ministries views Post Traumatic Stress as an injury and not a disorder, please visit [www.mashministries.org](http://www.mashministries.org).



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# Standing Strong for God's Truth

**E**phesians 3:16 says, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." The apostle Paul declared in Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." No one can be strong for the Lord in his own strength or willpower. Second Corinthians 3:5 states, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." First Corinthians 10:12 says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Standing strong for the Lord requires a total dependence on the Lord!

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:17, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." Some Bible scholars believe that Paul was referring to Nero. Others believe he was referring to 1 Peter 5:8, which says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Either way, Paul was delivered.

However, there are those who stood strong for God's truth and lost their lives because they did so. We find in the Scriptures a man of God named Stephen who stood for the Lord's truth, and his life was ended by being stoned to death. He boldly confronted the religious leaders with their hypocrisy and thundered out these words in Acts 7:51-52:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.

We see the religious leaders' response in verse 54, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." But it didn't stop there. Acts 7:58-60 records,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Here is a powerful testimony from the Scriptures of this godly man, Stephen, standing strong for God's truth.

We know of other godly men from history who have given their lives for the truth of God. I want to relate the life of John Huss, who lived from 1369 to 1415. I am going to quote from the book *Great Evangelical Preachers of Yesterday* by James McGraw.

John Huss drew upon himself the disfavor of Rome when he spoke out against the things he found to be at variance with the teachings of the Nazarene. He was in bitter conflict with his archbishop over the papal schism, an issue in ecclesiastical politics in his time. His opposition to the hierarchy became even more intense over the sale of indulgences, which he declared to be economic exploitation of the people and indefensible on the part of the church.

Because of his strong convictions against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, Huss was banned from preaching in all the churches in Prague. Again, I quote another powerful statement about Huss in this book: "John Huss was bold to proclaim his faith and unafraid to defend it. Papal bulls did not intimidate him. Threats and abuses did not turn him from his steadfast position and storms of ecclesiastical criticism did not veer him away from his purpose." Listen to what Huss said in the last days of his ministry:

I avow it to be my purpose to defend the truth of the holy scriptures, even to death, since I know that the truth stands and is forever mighty and abides eternally; and with Him there is no respecter of persons. And if the fear of death should terrify me, still I hope in my God and in the assistance of the Holy Spirit that the Lord will give me firmness. And if I have found favor in His sight, He will crown me with martyrdom.

As he stood before the council of Constance he refused to recant or change his position, so they tied him to the stake to be burned as a heretic. Again, I quote: "While the flames leaped about his body, John Huss cried, 'O, Christ, Thou Son of the living God, have mercy upon us.'" What a man of God! What an example to all the Lord's people of standing strong for God's truth! May we all be encouraged by the testimonies of these two godly men.

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