

January/February 2022

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

A photograph of a room during a move. In the foreground, several large cardboard boxes are stacked. A small potted plant is visible on the left. In the background, a blue sofa is partially visible, along with a lamp with a white shade and a black metal shelving unit holding more boxes and decorative items. The wall is a light blue color.

Trusting God in Life's Transitions

FRONTLINE

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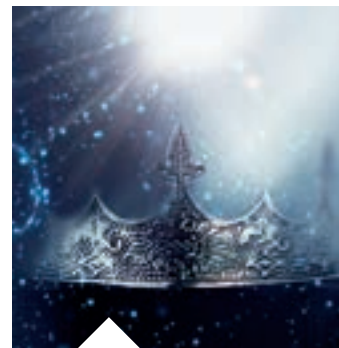
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Our sincere thanks to Dr. Bruce McAllister for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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This edition of *FrontLine* magazine engages the theme of “Trusting God in Life’s Transitions.” Our dedicated team of writers overviews various phases of life in which we need to trust God, underscoring the need to “trust in him at all times” (Ps. 62:8). Ben Hicks sets forth a straightforward challenge to young adults to quickly and effectively transition to adulthood. Kristopher and Elise Schaal share their personal and heartfelt insights about how unanticipated changes come with a new marriage, children, sickness, and relocations. Kevin Schaal gives practical advice to parents whose grown children need a different approach to their loving care. Tim Waycaster honors his late father by telling the story of his dad’s transition to full-time ministry followed by his unexpected transition to heaven. Claudia Barba cleverly and candidly describes her response to constantly changing ministry settings through a look at Priscilla’s experiences in Scripture. And Roger Duvall shares a sobering story of meeting his father’s late-life needs, a reminder for us all to prepare well for both our parents and our children.

The Psalms frequently remind us to trust God.

- “Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his *trust*” (40:4).
- We trust Him because He has not forsaken us (9:10).
- We trust in Him even when our hearts would be afraid or fearful.

“He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, *trusting* in the LORD” (112:7).

“What time I am afraid, I will *trust* in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my *trust*; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me” (56:3–4).

“But I *trusted* in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God, my times are in thy hand” (31:13–14a).

“*Trust* in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (37:3–4).

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that *trusteth* in thee” (84:11–12).

“It is better to *trust* in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (118:9).

“Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I *trust*: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I life up my soul unto thee” (143:8).

And Proverbs 3:5–6 is a well-proven anchor for us all: “*Trust* in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”


We can trust God because He is entirely trustworthy!

I treasure a large-print Bible on my GFA office shelf. It was once owned by our family’s pastor, who led me to Christ over sixty years ago in the front seat of his 1957 Studebaker. Dr. Jack Spratt’s convicting gospel preaching and personal care for my soul meant so much. He pointed me to a trustworthy Savior who has never once failed me. I used Dr. Spratt’s Bible to prepare this introduction. What a tangible reminder of God’s unfailing, never-ending love and trustworthy character that will see us through all of life’s transitions!

Bruce McAllister

Fulfilling God's Purpose

Transitions in the Twenties



Paul's statement that he put away childish things when he became a man (1 Cor. 13:11) succinctly sums up one of life's starkest and most difficult transitions: the transition from being a youth to being an adult. Those who work with young adults recognize this difficulty. J. C. Ryle recognized it when he wrote *Thoughts for Young Men*, a nineteenth-century book that sounds like it could have been written yesterday. Solomon recognized it when he repeatedly addressed Proverbs to "my son" and warned about the dangers of lust, laziness, simplicity, and folly.

In *The Screwtape Letters* C. S. Lewis imagines a series of letters written by an elderly, experienced demon to his protégé in order to help the young demon better tempt humans. If Lewis were to write such a letter about someone in their twenties today it might look something like this:

Do everything in your power to keep them stuck. Keep them so busy with nothingness, yet so overwhelmed by the normal responsibilities of life, and so burdened by guilt from both that they are unable to move forward. Never underestimate the damage they can do. Their energy and confidence have led to countless losses for us over the centuries. To eliminate such a threat, find ways to drain them emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Keep them up late watching Netflix. Assure them they have time to get everything done and then incite panic that they are so behind. Get them to watch entertainment that bothers their conscience, but not quite enough that they turn it off. Take what should be their most productive years and

convince them to trade them for cheap thrills that leave them empty and always hungry for more.

Sadly, such an account describes many Christian young adults in the twenty-first century. They find themselves stepping into a complex world they feel unready for. Normal responsibilities such as purchasing insurance, paying rent, buying and maintaining a car, remembering to make all their regular payments (on time), and a host of similar tasks can feel overwhelming. They are so constantly connected to the thinking of the world through phones, they can't imagine being without one, and they are connected to the thinking of the world through unbelievably high-quality entertainment that presents a very different view of reality from the Bible. The result is that many young adults find themselves directionless, frustrated that they aren't making progress, but not sure what needs to change.

How does God's Word address these problems? And what hope is there for the future? I would like to suggest two perspectives for growing into adulthood: purpose and responsibility. With a proper biblical understanding of these two concepts, young adults will find themselves equipped to confidently step into a challenging world and a busy life ready to live for God's glory.

PURPOSE

Many in their twenties grew up being fed grandiose visions of changing the world and following their dreams, only to realize that they probably won't dramatically change the world and that following your dreams involves more hard work than

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dreaming. Scripture paints a different picture of the purpose God gives us, one that is both more satisfying and more incredible.

God's initial purpose for humanity is given in the first two chapters of Genesis. God creates man and gives him the job of "subduing" and ruling His world (Gen. 1:28). Chapter two builds on this command when God puts Adam into the garden to work and guard it (Gen. 2:15). All human work, then, can be thought of as ruling, working, and protecting the creation that has been entrusted to us. This means that "secular" work matters too, because it is humanity participating in the divinely ordained project to bring order, beauty, and structure to God's creation. Whether you are researching proteins, working on a construction crew, or helping people buy the right insurance policy, you are fulfilling God's intended purpose for humans. This means your job matters and has spiritual significance, so take it seriously! Taking it seriously might mean finishing a degree, starting a degree, or finding an apprenticeship. It will mean working hard and

begrudgingly. Seeing what God is up to in the world today ought to excite and motivate every believer, because every believer has a part to play in the work of the church (1 Cor. 12).

God has given humanity a high calling—to rule over His creation by building, protecting, creating, and defending. God has also given His redeemed people an equally high calling—to spread the good news of God's plan of salvation with those who are now His enemies but may become sons. Those who wish to beat the doldrums of apathy will do so first by realizing the purpose God has given them.

RESPONSIBILITY

But while having purpose is important, it is not enough. God's purpose will never be achieved if we are not ready to put in the work. Good intentions alone will not accomplish God's plan: hard work will be needed for that. Indeed, changing the world for Christ rarely looks like one big, dramatic activity that takes place someday in the future. Normally it looks like a steady

Sunday school on time; faithful to be the best Amazon driver you can be; faithful to read God's Word daily; faithful to make a hundred small, hard decisions instead of giving in to a hundred easy ones.

But what if the responsibility seems too great? Where does someone start when he feels buried by a mountain of responsibility and isn't sure where to begin? Two answers will hopefully be helpful with this question. First, realize that God empowers us to do that which we can't do on our own. If you feel overwhelmed by life, that's good. When you are overwhelmed, run to the One whose strength shines greatest in your weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Realize that God is for you (Rom. 8:31) and stands ready to help with whatever you need, no matter how big or small.

Second, get started by doing one small thing that needs to get done, and then when that's done do the next thing. Perhaps the old proverb put it best: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." I have found that when I simply buckle down and start tackling what seems like an insurmountable task one bite at a time, I soon realize the elephant is actually more like a mouse. Pick one thing that you need to show responsibility in, pray for God's help, and then tackle it. Then do this again and again as you work with God to build the character and maturity needed to live for God's glory.

Generations come and go. Each new generation means a new opportunity for the people of God to impact the world around them. This impact happens when young adults see their ultimate purpose as being faithful in whatever God has given them to do while advancing the work of the church. It happens when they decide to take responsibility for their personal lives and work hard faithfully in the little things God has given them. Through this process we, like Paul, learn to put away childish things so that we too might become adults. When this happens, God graciously takes our simple, humble work and mysteriously magnifies it and uses it to accomplish His eternal plan.

IF YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED BY LIFE, THAT'S GOOD. WHEN YOU ARE OVERWHELMED, RUN TO THE ONE WHOSE STRENGTH SHINES GREATEST IN YOUR WEAKNESS (2 COR. 12:9). REALIZE THAT GOD IS FOR YOU (ROM. 8:31) AND STANDS READY TO HELP WITH WHATEVER YOU NEED, NO MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL.

doing your best because the work you do is important to God, no matter how seemingly small or mundane.

But in Genesis 3 sin is introduced, and man's relationship with God, others, and the creation is scarred. In response God set in motion His plan to redeem fallen humanity, a plan that reached its climax on Calvary. Now God has tasked us with the incredible responsibility of being ambassadors for His mission (2 Cor. 5:18–21) as we seek to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20) and help Christ build His unconquerable church (Matt. 16:18). When a purpose like this really sinks in, it turns church attendance from a chore into a calling. Evangelism stops being a burden and becomes an opportunity. Giving is done joyfully and expectantly rather than

stream of small, responsible decisions doing what God has asked you to do today.

Christ tells an important parable about responsibility (Matt. 25:14–30). Several servants are given money to manage in the absence of their master, and when the first two use that money well they are told, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." The principle is simple yet profound: show responsibility wherever it has been given. The little details of your life matter to God because He wants to see you be responsible with what you have before He gives you more responsibility. He wants to see you faithful in the little things: faithful to spend less money than you make; faithful to get up at 8:30 on a Sunday to be at

Ben Hicks is the pastor of discipleship ministries at Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Indianapolis. In his time at Colonial he has been very involved in young-adult ministries and hopes to see his generation make a big impact for the kingdom.



Navigating the Changes of Early Adulthood



Early adulthood is a stage filled with lots of change. Each step on the stereotypical path to adulthood (finish school, move out, get a job, get married, have children) is accompanied by a major transition—and there are other changes as well. Trusting God in the face of the next big step becomes a recurring theme.

Elise and I faced our fair share of changes during the past eleven years. We enjoyed reflecting on lessons God taught us through those transitions and trust these lessons will bless you as well.

KRISTOPHER: FIRST YEAR OF MARRIAGE

I was surprised by how difficult our first year of marriage was. Challenges included a cross-country move, new jobs, and grad school. On a typical evening, Elise and I would talk on the way home (we carpooled) and over dinner for about thirty minutes. After that, Elise would say goodnight for the evening, and I would hit the books. I

was often exhausted. What did God teach me that year?

1. *Be humble.* God used year one of marriage to expose my selfishness. I remember going into it thinking how godly I was. God humbled me by giving me fresh insights into my sinful heart almost daily. Elise and I never fought, but we had more conflict and misunderstanding than I care to admit. These were important growing times for me.

Transition may reveal your selfishness too. Avoid blaming your sin on your circumstances. Instead, admit the ways you need to grow, and ask God for help.

2. *Avoid overloading.* During my first several months in seminary, I was a full-time first-year teacher and grad student,

and I commuted three hours per day. I barely survived till Thanksgiving break. Sometimes busyness can't be avoided. However, remember that God made us to rest (Ps. 127:2). During times of transition, we are often test-driving new schedules. We need to be quick to admit signs of burnout and to be nimble to make necessary adjustments.

ELISE: CHILDREN

God has blessed us with four wonderful children—three girls and a boy. Our oldest arrived while Kristopher was in grad school, and the next three came every two years like clockwork. With each child, big changes began the day we received a positive pregnancy test and continued rapidly through the child's first birthday. Here are some lessons we learned.

1. *Prepare ahead of time.* You may think I'm referring to stocking your freezer or cleaning your house, but no. I believe the best way to prepare for a second child is by training your first one.

Ephesians 6:1–3 emphasizes the importance of teaching your kids to obey. How well they obey, in conjunction with independent play, will directly affect your ability to do things like nurse uninterrupted or catch a quick nap.

2. *Remember your priorities.* It's easy to get frustrated when you're forced to take a step back from ministry involvement due to the demands of parenting. However, you must remember that serving looks different in various seasons of life, and clarifying your priorities brings peace.

Titus 2:4–5 speaks to the priorities a Christian mother should have. The order is (1) God, (2) your husband, (3) your children, and (4) ministry outside the home.

KRISTOPHER: PROMOTION/DEMOTION

After grad school, we moved to California, where I became an assistant pastor. Little did we know that God's plan was for me to become the interim pastor just one month into the job! The next year was the hardest one we have faced, but God was so faithful. Here are two lessons I learned.

1. *We need the body of Christ.* While I was interim pastor, Elise experienced a difficult pregnancy. The day the doctor prescribed three months of full bed rest I was in shock. When I shared the news that night in prayer meeting, our church family rose to the occasion. They sent meals, helped with child-care—one dear friend even ironed my shirts!

Our hearts were knit together in powerful ways through that time. We needed them, and they needed me. Church members always need one another, but we sense our need more during times of transition.

2. *You will look back and be thankful.* It seemed like I may become the next senior pastor, but God had other plans. After nine months of leading the church, I went back to being the assistant pastor. At first that was discouraging, but God's way is best. The next five years were some of the happiest, most spiritually prosperous our family has known.

I cannot imagine my life apart from those nine grueling months or the five years that followed. God shaped us in ways we cannot describe and gave us friends who became priceless treasures. We did not choose that path for ourselves, but we are so grateful for what the Lord did.

ELISE: SICKNESS

God has allowed me to face two periods of sustained physical struggle during our marriage. First, while pregnant with our second-born, I was on strict bed rest for three months. Then, this past year, I got sick with COVID. Here are some lessons God taught me.

1. *Look for ways to remain productive.* God made us to work, even when we are physically limited. Here are some ways that I tried to do that. While I was on bed rest, though couch-ridden, I tried to engage with our one-year-old daughter. I did my best to encourage others through phone calls or texts. And God gave me a chance to invest in a young lady who was helping care for me and our daughter. These are just things that I did. You may want to focus on prayer or listening to an audiobook or the Bible. Be creative and keep your mind active.
2. *Focus on pleasing God in the moment, not on pleasing people* (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4). After I got sick with COVID, I struggled with weariness and brain fog for several months. Although normally very extroverted, I found myself withdrawing from conversations because I was embarrassed by my lack of memory. I struggled to recall names, the details of past conversations, or even basic facts from my week!

On top of it all, we had just moved back to Phoenix, so many people didn't know me very well. I had to counsel myself to care more about God's opinion of me than about the opinions of others. For me, this meant talking to people, including teens and their parents (my husband is the youth pastor), even if I thought they might think I was stupid or incompetent.

KRISTOPHER: MOVE

Last year, God brought us back to Phoenix, where I became an assistant pastor

at the church where I grew up. Here are two lessons from that transition.

1. *Take time and seek godly counsel before making a major decision.* Before deciding to move back to Phoenix, Elise and I sought lots of counsel. We also prayed a lot, searched the Scriptures, and searched our own hearts. As a result, we were able to make the decision with confidence.
Scripture warns against hasty decisions (Luke 14:28–32) and urges us to seek godly counsel (Prov. 11:14). Sadly, many Christians fail to heed this advice and make poor decisions. If you are facing a major decision (such as a cross-country move or a job change), I challenge you to seek your pastor's advice. God will honor your teachable spirit.
2. *Learn to love where God placed you.* God has been kind to us. In the last year, we moved into a nice home, were blessed with new opportunities, and I was able to rekindle old friendships and minister with family and friends. Still, the transition was hard.

No life situation is perfect. There will always be things you like and things you don't like. The foolish man goes through life discontented, but the wise man learns to love where God placed him (Phil. 4:11–13). Contentment grows in the heart that trusts and delights in the Lord (Heb. 13:5–6).

In eighteenth-century Germany Katharina Von Schlegel wrote a beautiful poem about trusting God amid transition and loss. Having been translated to English, Katharina's poem became one of the best-loved hymns in our language—"Be Still My Soul." This line from verse one says it all: "*In every change, He faithful will remain.*"

Early adult life is a time filled with changes. However, through it all, God is faithful.

Kristopher and Elise Schaal have four children. Kristopher serves as youth and discipleship pastor at Northwest Valley Baptist Church, Gendale, Arizona.



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The Most Difficult Transition in Parenting

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
(1 Cor. 13:11)

Paul was using this cultural principle to explain the superiority of love to the Corinthian church. I am afraid the lesson would be lost in our culture because we have little idea what it is to put away childish things. We live in a Peter Pan culture where very few people really want to grow up.

Why is this? There are a number of reasons, but one of them is a transition problem. **Many parents are unwilling to make the appropriate transition in parenting from the authority role to the counselor role.**



THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

You all know the stories. We even joke about it—the twenty-five-year-old living at home with Mom cooking for him, cleaning his room for him, and doing his laundry. This has become so much a factor in our culture that sociologists are saying that adolescence now extends until age twenty-five or even thirty.¹ Some psychologists consider this a positive development.² For most of us, we understand the importance of taking on adult responsibilities in order to live a life pleasing to God. There is no biblical allowance to spend ten years of life slumming around and living for personal enjoyment and fun.

THE TRANSITION THAT MUST HAPPEN

Parents are the ultimate authority for small children. Parents make every decision. As children age, decision-making responsibilities gradually transition from the parents to the children under parental supervision. They tie their own shoes at four or five. They go to school without the



parents present at five or six. Eventually they learn to do chores around the house on their own schedule. By the time they are in late elementary school, they are taking responsibility for getting their own homework finished without parental prompting. At sixteen they learn to drive and obey the rules of the road without parents present.

Sometimes they take big steps all at once. The transition to junior high often means they leave the maternal guidance of a single-teacher classroom for the specialized teachers and classrooms of high school, college, and beyond. The day that children go off to college is a huge step in the transition of the parental role.

Many parents do not handle this transition process well. It's often the parents who want to continue to treat their children—even adult children—as if they are still little children under complete parental authority. By the time a child enters college, parents should have almost completely transitioned from the parent/authority role to the parent/counselor role. There might be specific instances where Dad might have

to step in and say “no,” but it should be a rare moment.

THE TRANSITION TO A DIFFERENT AUTHORITY

The mistake that many parents make in this process is that they fail to understand or communicate that the transition for the child is not from parental authority to unfettered personal license, but from parental authority to God's authority. True followers of Christ do not live their lives under the dictates of their own personal whims. God is our authority, and His will must be considered in every life decision, no matter how small. My goal for my children is to successfully transition them from my authority to God's.

BOYS MUST BE TREATED LIKE MEN

I cringe when I hear a mother talk about her preteen and teen boys as her “babies.” To her it sounds affectionate. To the boys it is demeaning at best and at worst gives license to act like babies. This is often why

there is conflict between mothers and their boys during the teenage years. Boys will start to draw closer to their fathers, who treat them more like men. Boys tend to behave in the way that they are being treated. Place childlike expectations and supervision on them and they will behave like children. Begin treating them more like men and they tend to behave more like men.

GIRLS MUST BE RESPECTED LIKE WOMEN

Likewise, I have encountered fathers who hover over their adult daughters as though they are in elementary school. Dads sometimes think that this authoritative protecting role is solely their responsibility until their daughters marry. I remember dealing with a dad who habitually interfered in his adult daughter's professional business (as in work) when she was in her forties! He actually interfered with her employees. There is nothing wrong with a father filling a protective role for his adult daughter when she wants it, but not from a position of authority.

WHEN GIVING ACCOUNT TO GOD, SAYING, “THIS IS WHAT MY DAD TOLD ME TO DO” WILL NOT HOLD THE SAME WEIGHT IT DID WHEN THEY WERE CHILDREN.

MARRIAGE MEANS LEAVING

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Gen. 2:24)

In my daughter's wedding ceremony, I took her hand and placed it in the hand of her new husband. That was a critical moment. I was passing my responsibility for protecting her to a new man—one who has proven himself exceedingly worthy of that role. I gladly will serve as a guide and counselor to this young couple, but they are now an independent family unit established before God. One of the most important responsibilities I have as a father is to respect their union and my new role. Likewise, I must give my sons the freedom to lead their families in submission and obedience to God as dictated by the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the consciences that I helped guide as they grew up.

REBELS CREATE PROBLEMS

But what about when they live disobediently to God? Rebellion creates problems in the transition from parent/authority to parent/counselor on several levels.

Often the rebellious child succeeds in preventing a parent from ever actually becoming the parent authority. I am not blaming this on the child, although there truly is sin on their own part. Rebellious kids are just often more stubborn than their parents. They have learned that they can outlast their parents' will. Whether out of exhaustion or fear, parents give in to their child and they become the parent/counselor rather than the parent/authority far too early in life. They let their three-year-old determine what he will eat for supper. They let their ten-year-old stay home from church because they do not want to “force religion on her.” They fail to see that the ten-year-old is not making a faith choice, she is making a self-will choice. Giving in at this age does not prepare the child to follow God's authority later in life. All it does is

condition the child to be her own master and send her on a path toward spiritual destruction.

Rebels create problems even when the parents hold the line. It is difficult to make the gradual transition from parent/authority to parent/counselor through the teen years because rebels misuse any level of personal autonomy given them. Because of this, parents are forced to remain in the parent/authority role longer than they would like and longer than what should exist in a healthy growing process.

The result usually is a Prodigal Son moment where the transition happens suddenly and with great damage to both parents and children and the relationship. The real world can be a very painful place for a young woman or man who has not learned to transition responsibly throughout their teen years.

Even very good parents sometimes deal with rebellious children, but a parent who doesn't understand his role in transitioning his children from their own authority to God's runs the risk of stunting their emotional and spiritual growth or even exasperating them.

THE COUNSELOR ROLE REAPS HUGE REWARDS

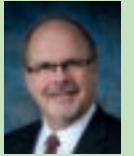
The problem with trying to hang on to the parental authority role too long is that it often results in sacrificing the parental counselor role. If a parent seeks to exert authority every time a child comes for counsel, the child will eventually stop coming for counsel, and the parent will lose influence altogether.

The counselor role for adult children is a biblical concept. Baptists believe in individual soul liberty and responsibility. Our children will be responsible to God—not us—for the choices they make in life. When giving account to God, saying, “This is what my dad told me to do” will not hold the same weight it did when they were children. They need to make right choices out

of submission to Him, not submission to us. Right choices for the wrong reasons are just as wrong as wrong choices. The counselor role affords much more opportunity to impact the heart and thinking without simply dictating behavior.

Understanding this transition process and its importance gives new insight into this verse: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Kevin Schaal graduated from Bob Jones University with a BA in 1984, later earning his MDiv from Calvary Baptist Seminary (Lansdale, Pennsylvania) and his DMin from International Baptist College (Chandler, Arizona). He has served as the pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church since 1987 and currently serves as president of FBFi.



¹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/extended-adolescence-when-25-is-the-new-181/>

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/11/metaplasticity/506390/>

IN SHORT

Remember the Goal

The transition for the child is from parental authority to God's authority.

Start Early

Begin treating them more like men and women and they tend to behave accordingly.

Remember the Boundaries

After they are married, one of the most important responsibilities I have as a father is to respect their union and my new role.

Curb Rebellion

Rebellious kids are just often more stubborn than their parents. Whether out of exhaustion or fear, parents give in to their child and they become the parent/counselor rather than the parent/authority far too early in life.

Embrace Your New Role

The counselor role affords much more opportunity to impact the heart and thinking without simply dictating behavior.



Midlife Transition to Vocational Ministry

Life is full of transitions—from child to adult, from school to career, from single to married, from no kids to kids and then back to no kids again, from young to old, and from living to dying. Through all the transitions of life, God is with us. My father's testimony is a story of the transitions in his life and how God dramatically changed his life trajectory. His story should be an encouragement to you, especially if you are in full-time Christian service or are considering it.

THE TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

Kevin Waycaster was born into a non-Christian home—more accurately, into an anti-Christian home.

Before he finished high school he had started a job in an auto parts store that would turn into a career. One day as he was

closing up, he asked his coworker to go to a strip club with him. His coworker, who was a genuine believer responded, “Kevin, I love Jesus too much to do that.” The answer shocked my dad. All the Christians my father had ever met had been hypocrites. Over the next few months, Dad would repeatedly ask this coworker questions about Christianity and what he believed. God was working in his heart, and a few months later, at the age of nineteen, my father accepted Christ as his Savior.

THE TRANSITION TO A CHRISTIAN FAMILY AND SECULAR CAREER

After accepting Christ and leaving behind a life of sin, my father decided to go to Bible college. He had heard about New Tribes Bible Institute from a friend, and so he applied and was accepted. However, to gain admission, my father lied on his application to cover up

sin that was in his past. After spending just a few months at the school, he was convicted by the Holy Spirit regarding his lie and confessed it to the administration, who justifiably expelled him.

At that point, it would have been easy to give up on living the Christian life, but my father did not. He trusted God and every day took the next right step. Despite this apparent setback, my father continued going to church and serving in church. There he met a lovely young lady, married her, and together they started a family. He continued his career in business, working for the same auto parts company for the next twenty-five years. He chose to model his behavior in business after the biblical example of Joseph. That proved wise, and he rose to an executive position as vice president.

THE TRANSITION TO FULL-TIME MINISTRY MID-CAREER

As our family grew, we would periodically go on road trips to see some of my mother's family in Grand Junction, Colorado. On the way there from Phoenix, Arizona, we would take Highway 191 through Utah, which is deep in Mormon country. As we would drive through the towns of Blanding, Monticello, and Moab, my dad noticed that there was not a single gospel-preaching church in those communities. He saw the need. The Lord began to stir my dad's heart as He had done Paul's with the Macedonian call. Even though my dad's heart was burdened, he resisted the work of the Lord. Perhaps he remembered his past failures, or maybe he was just too comfortable in his current situation; I won't know for sure until I see him again in heaven.

The Lord brought my father to a decision point in the summer of 1999. Dad had planned an ambitious family vacation to Tennessee to see his side of the family. Our family later dubbed it our “nightmare vacation.” The trip was terrible before it even started. I contracted chicken pox at a friend's birthday party and subsequently spread it to my siblings. Despite our illness, the trip could not be delayed. Imagine driving across the country with four small children, all in various stages of illness

Continued on page 28

Traveling through Tr

Change is hard for me. I would be content to live in the same place, literally and symbolically, every day of my life—which makes it interesting that my instinctively immobile self has lived such a mobile, unpredictable life. (A livelier adjective would be “peripatetic,” but you’d have to look that one up.)

I tell myself that I prefer to know what’s coming next just so I can be prepared. But a more likely truth is that I’m uneasy with surrendering control. Even when I can watch change approaching from far down the road, I’m unsettled and even a little fearful when it arrives. Change muddles my mind and troubles my spirit.

But the Lord has called us to a traveling ministry, so we have been on the move for decades, driving up and down the interstates, stopping to help churches wherever we are needed, putting down roots quickly and pulling them up long before I’m ready. And—I love it! This is totally God’s doing in me. He has gradually taught me to not only accept changes, but to welcome them as valuable transitions.

I WAS UNPREPARED FOR MY NEW ROLE AND RESISTANT TO THE CHANGE. BUT MY CHOICE WAS EITHER TO SAY NO TO GOD’S OBVIOUS CALLING OR, DESPITE MY FEARS OF INADEQUACY, MAKE A WILLING TRANSITION. WHEN I YIELDED, HIS GRACE BEGAN OVERFLOWING IN ME, AND THAT INITIAL TRAUMA WAS FOLLOWED BY JOYFUL, FRUITFUL YEARS OF MINISTRY. I AM GLAD I SAID YES.

“TRANSITION” VS. “CHANGE”

“Transition” is a much sweeter word than “change,” don’t you think? Change can feel like something happening outside my control, sometimes with frightening abruptness. Ready or not, here change comes!

But even a jolting, unwelcome change can become a graceful transition if I will yield my will to God’s and by faith believe this: wherever He sends me, He has something for me to learn and someone for me to help. This is what I see modeled in the life of Priscilla,* my traveling sister and New Testament model of how to handle change.

A SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLE

Priscilla’s first move was not by choice. Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome, so Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, were forced to leave their homeland. It was the hardest kind of change—one imposed by someone who doesn’t care.

They sailed from Italy to Greece and disembarked at Corinth, where they

were immediately immersed in an alien culture. Banished from home, surrounded by strangers with odd customs and a bewildering language, Priscilla must have wondered, “What am I doing here?” I don’t know if Priscilla and Aquila had already believed in Jesus before they came to Corinth. I hope so. But whether they knew it or not, it was God who directed them to their new home.

To provide for themselves, they began a tentmaking business. That’s how they met Paul, the bivocational apostle who had come to Corinth bearing the good news. Soon Priscilla and Aquila were sharing both their labor and their home with Paul.

During long days of heavy work and evenings of rich conversation, as Priscilla and Aquila absorbed the truths God was steadily revealing to Paul, Priscilla began to understand why she was there. God had reserved a seat for her in a tiny, exclusive Bible college. He had things to teach her.

And He had people for her to help. The sins of the city had seeped into the Corinthian church plant. Disorderly women caused ruckus in the services; bizarre sexual issues emerged; fusses and feuds escalated into court cases. Poor Paul had to deal with ugly messes caused by fleshly folks who didn’t know any better.

And there, right where she was needed, stood Priscilla, a tentmaking refugee turned helper for the missionary-apostle. Women she did not know in a place she never planned to be needed a model of Christian womanhood, so God sent Priscilla.

I thought of Priscilla in Corinth when the Lord sent us to serve Him in a hard place. It was dreary, and I was downhearted. I thought I deserved better—but God was at work making me better. There I learned that it’s possible to be in God’s will but not feel happy. There I learned that contentment is not rooted in my circumstances but

ansitions

in my heart. Gradually, patiently, in that testing place, God changed me.

That ministry was short-term (hallelujah). So was Priscilla and Aquila's time in Corinth. After eighteen months, they sailed with Paul to Ephesus. They had caught Paul's contagious passion for the gospel, and other people in other places needed to hear it. It was time for a change.

Left alone in Ephesus while Paul traveled, Priscilla and Aquila made tents and disciples, just as they had done in Corinth. A church began to take shape in their home. On a Sabbath in the synagogue, they encountered Apollos—brilliant, well-educated Apollos; a Jew from Alexandria; an eloquent, fervent, and sincere preacher—of a deficient gospel.

What to do? The one with authority was away. Priscilla and Aquila were just a couple who sewed tents and told people about Jesus. It would be intimidating for them to confront a man of such intellect. But if they didn't do it, who would?

So, privately, tactfully, and probably trembling, Priscilla and Aquila transitioned into team teachers of a remedial theology class for one. The entire Early Church benefited from Priscilla and Aquila's quiet counseling of Apollos, for he soon became a mighty defender of the faith and apologist for the deity of Christ.

UNPREPARED AND RESISTANT?

Maybe, like me, the Lord has asked you to do something you are sure you cannot do, and you hope He'll quickly figure that out. In my mid-thirties, the Lord moved our family from a blue house with a backyard tree swing into a forty-foot-long moving hallway called an RV. Overnight, I changed from the wife of the pastor of an established church with staff and school . . . to the wife of a full-time itinerant evangelist (same man) with all that the new life would



require of me—including homeschooling, music and children's classes every evening, and weekly shuffles to new homesites.

I was unprepared for my new role and resistant to the change. But my choice was either to say no to God's obvious calling or, despite my fears of inadequacy, make a willing transition. When I yielded, His grace began overflowing in me, and that initial trauma was followed by joyful, fruitful years of ministry. I am glad I said yes. (Of course, by the time I figured out what I was doing, it was time for another change.)

For Priscilla, too, change was on the way. When it was safe, she and Aquila moved back to Rome. At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul greets them as, "Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Rom. 16:3–4). How had they saved Paul's life? I wish I knew. They had been on the scene of one of the risky episodes in Paul's adventures, where, though it was not their goal or plan, they transitioned into superheroes.

But these two were still about their main business. In the same passage, Paul asks the Romans to greet the church meet-

ing in Priscilla and Aquila's house. Now three important New Testament churches—in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome—have had this couple as charter members.

Sixteen years after Paul had first met his tentmaking and church-planting partners in Corinth, he was chained in a Roman prison awaiting execution. Surely now Priscilla and Aquila can put up their feet and rest. No more moves and changes for them, right?

Wrong. In the final paragraph of Paul's final letter, one of his greetings is to—you guessed it—his old friends, who had moved back to Ephesus. Their pastor, Timothy, needed encouragement to do right. Paul's two letters to his son in the faith reminded Timothy to be pure, to preserve sound doctrine, to be fearless, and to endure. Lofty goals for a young man in ministry.

But there in his congregation sat Priscilla and Aquila, living models of those core values. Purity had been the challenge in Corinth. Accurate doctrine was what they had taught Apollos. Courage was what it took to rescue Paul. Endurance is what they were modeling now. Priscilla and Aquila had transitioned into priceless collaborators in the gospel, the kind of veteran servants every pastor loves to see in his pews.

Not all changes are geographic. Relationships change. So do vocations and status and finances and health. Maybe the latest changes in you are the ones you see in the mirror and the surprising number of small people calling you "Grandma." Or maybe though you have sat in the same spot forever, the world outside your windows has changed so much that it's unrecognizable.

Whether the changes are in you or around you, sudden or gradual, compulsory or voluntary, welcome or unwanted, none are random. They are allowed by your Father for your good. Believe that and be like Priscilla. Yield to the changes the Lord brings, and you will see Him transform them into graceful transitions. And along the way, you will discover that He is changing you.

* Acts 18; Romans 16:3–5;
1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.

Claudia Barba and her husband, Dave, serve the Lord through Press On! Ministries, helping new and struggling churches in the USA (www.ipresson.com). Claudia is the author of Bible study books for women and of *The Monday Morning Club*, a book of encouragement for women in ministry. The Barbas have three grown children and seven perfect grandchildren.



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Peace in End-of-Life Preparations

You may question inclusion of such a somber topic with the theme of trusting God. End-of-life decisions and experiences can be some of the most challenging times that we will face. While we don't like to think about death, it is inevitable. We may be caught unprepared for the challenges that the death of a parent or spouse may bring. Even further, we may face greater challenges in trusting God during the days or years leading up to that separation. This is the story of my family's experiences in the later years of my parents' lives. While I have no legal advice, included are some practical actions that may be of

help in working through end-of-life preparations.

LIFE IS A VAPOR

I was fortunate to be raised by loving Christian parents who did their best to instill biblical values into my thinking. But life is a vapor; we get busy; we have families of our own; careers consume our days; and we may not realize the pace at which life is speeding by. We lived a couple of states away from Mom and Dad. Though it was a priority to spend as much time as possible with them, relatively short visits did not reveal all we needed to know about the effects of aging on them.

One day an unexpected phone call from their pastor conveyed concerns about my parents based on observations from their friends. Sure, our family had had prior conversations with Mom and Dad about relocating nearer to us, but we all knew the likelihood of that was slim. I did a quick road trip to evaluate the concerns for myself. To my surprise the first thing Dad said was, "It's time, find us a place to live." He had been asked by his doctor to surrender his driver's license and he saw that as a death sentence. What we later determined was that a prescription change had caused Dad several episodes of irrational behavior. But by God's leading and help,

I BELIEVE THAT SCRIPTURE PLACES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE MATTERS SQUARELY ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE FATHER BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO A FATHER-TO-CHILD RELATIONSHIP. THIS SAME RESPONSIBILITY APPLIES TO THE HUSBAND IN HIS CARE FOR HIS WIFE AND FAMILY.

within five months their house had been sold, Dad's medication problem was being resolved, and they had relocated to their newly renovated home within minutes of both my home and my brother's. Dad was eighty-seven. Mom was seventy-seven. Sometime during those first months, my wife commented to me that our lives had changed forever. Little did we know what the next few years would bring.

We began to observe that the aging process had impacted Mom far more than Dad. While Dad had several serious physical needs, it became clear that Mom had some form of dementia. A series of health crises accelerated her decline. Life quickly became more complicated, and care time became more demanding. Over the next few years, my own personal challenge in all of this was the conflict between parental needs and expectations, neglect of my own family, career demands, and, yes, even fulfilling responsibilities as a Sunday school teacher and deacon. I felt the friction. There were some very difficult decisions that that I had to wrestle with. At times, rather than trusting and resting in God, my spirit was in major turmoil.

Mom, Dad, and I never had a previously complete conversation about what their final years might look like. Although they said many times that they didn't want to be a bother yet wanted to pass away in their own home, we had never discussed specifics or options such as a personal care assistant or live-in caregiver. In the process of relocating them, we had quickly discussed concerns for legal documents such as wills, durable power of attorney for both finances and for healthcare, and their desire not to be kept alive artificially. When we signed those documents, it seemed convenient and logical for me to take on most of the legal roles.

NO EXPIRATION DATE

I soon felt the weight of responsibility for Mom and Dad. Personalities changed. Relationships changed. I believed strongly from Scripture that honoring my father and my mother was nonnegotiable, yet this train I was riding had bumpy tracks, was moving fast, and I feared that it might derail. My lack of trust in what God was doing in my life must have been obvious to friends and acquaintances as I started receiving unsolicited advice about what to do about my parents. I thought I knew what the Bible said on the subject, so I began an extrabiblical search to try to better understand my roles. What do "honor" and "obey" mean, and when do those responsibilities end? How does one maintain commitments and responsibilities when they seem to collide? My search for a resolution to my struggle was not very productive. I found very little helpful commentary to sort through my overlapping responsibilities. However, the more I searched Scripture, the more convinced I became that God's Word was clear. Scripture gives no expiration date on honoring parents, and it was my responsibility. I also had a responsibility to my wife and family, and there is a biblical priority placed on those relationships. I also found I had responsibilities to fulfill or acceptably modify my other commitments. But foundationally to all of these, I had a responsibility to trust God.

It was no coincidence that during the hardest of these times, I was teaching through Deuteronomy. This book has much emphasis on relationships and responsibilities. I found it very helpful that Moses gives the Israelites clear instructions regarding parent/child relationships as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Chapter 21 became particularly intriguing

to me, giving hard instructions to parents regarding a rebellious and unrepentant son. Although not a direct answer to my questions, I was moved by the thought of extreme challenges that must take place in some parent-child relationships. My conclusion was that during my struggles, God had a plan, He loved me, and I needed to trust Him.

DIFFICULT BUT NECESSARY CONVERSATIONS

Mom passed away about eight years after they relocated, and Dad passed away about nine. Through those years I came to understand a few practical processes that were needed. I believe that Scripture places the responsibility for these matters squarely on the shoulders of the father, but they are not limited to a father-to-child relationship. This same responsibility applies to the husband in his care for his wife and family. But if the father does not take the reins in taking care of the practical aspects of end-of-life planning, it would benefit the wife or responsible adult child to initiate the conversations.

The first priority—and perhaps the most difficult—is to have the needed conversations regarding desires for end-of-life care. There are many aspects to this. Who will be the decision-maker during this time of life? What type of care is desired? How will the care expenses be paid? What happens if one or more of the family members becomes incapacitated either physically or mentally? Does the parent understand the



need and role of a caregiver? It may be wise to seek legal advice and qualified financial counsel. The goal is to have open and honest conversation regarding end-of-life decisions with the understanding that plans may be forced to change based on unforeseeable circumstances. This will give the responsible party both a clear understanding of what is desired while giving freedom from feelings of guilt or second-guessing actions when circumstances change.

The second priority is to have a complete and accurate accounting of everything financial, including who will have financial access and who will have the financial management responsibility for the parent or spouse. Preparing a will and naming a personal representative are critical for handling assets after death but most financial pressures come before death. My parents took care of bill payments with my oversight for as long as they were able to do so. While Dad had a keen mental sense of his financial situation, he did not keep good written records. Mom, a former banker, became increasingly frustrated by financial numbers. It is very important to locate and compile all financial information and to review it while all parties have the capacity to do so. Even with the focus that I had with my parents' finances, after their deaths I experienced several surprises. When combing through boxes, pockets, dresser and desk drawers, even short notes scribbled on envelope flaps became important.



WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT?

- Update information on the finance records of parents and spouses regularly.
- In addition to assets, compile a list of debts that will become obligations or burdens to survivors, and initiate a plan to reduce debt.
- Recap routine income amounts such as retirement and interest.
- List routine payments such as estimated taxes, mortgage, utilities, and even car insurance.
- Determine how income from retirement policies and Social Security will change at the time of death and how a surviving spouse will need to adjust.
- Be sure to obtain needed computer passwords and passwords for proper account access. Keep all such information in a secure but accessible location.
- Investigate banking laws regarding joint account ownership in the parents' state.
- Consider long-term-care insurance and life insurance.
- Determine if deeds and titles are up to date and whether they convey ownership to the survivor. These could be highly advantageous for access to funds and probate avoidance.
- As needed, seek out the help of qualified financial and legal counsel.

Most of us either have experienced or will go through similar situations. Ours was not unique, and we have been very grateful that our experience was not complicated by the COVID crisis. We do not have to go through end-of-life complexities alone. We have a loving Heavenly Father who knows our needs. He gives strength. He gives hope. He gives encouragement. We need to give honor to whom it is due, and we need to trust in the one who has told us to cast all of our care upon Him, because He cares for us.

Roger Duvall serves on the FBFI board. He recently retired and is an active member of Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina.



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Mailbag

I have read and studied your article [Jason Armstrong, "The Great Awakening and the New Birth," Sept/Oct 2021]. You have done an excellent job of research and writing. I personally believe it to be the best I have ever read and studied. May I commend you on your hard work, research, and scribing this article. It is very informative and much needed at this present time. After fifty years in the ministry, I still see a great need for the elements you covered about Salvation. I meet so many that are new and old Believers that are still confused about their Conversion, Profession of Faith, Baptism, Communion, and living for God. God's people need an excellent teacher in these subjects, and I am convinced that your article would fill a great need in teaching the Lord's Children.

Eddie Woodfield
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Thank you for your leadership of the FBFI and for this clear, [discerning] article on Proclaim and Defend about the indifferentists [https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2021/11/28/the-indifferentists/]. I especially appreciated your insight about those desiring a less combative Christianity, a nicer fundamentalist Christianity.

John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostle John, and Paul would no doubt have been roundly criticized for their bold combativeness against falsehood and those who refused to practice secondary separation in their day.

Steve Hankins
Greenville, SC

Very recently I have become reacquainted with *FrontLine* magazine, after multiple moves all over the United States (now in South Carolina). How refreshing it is to rediscover this fundamental publication that has not fallen prey to the compromise of these days in "Christian" publications and churches. *FrontLine* has articles with sound Bible theology, testimonies from godly believers, practical encouragements for helping God's people live lives of holiness and separation in the "midst of a crooked and perverse generation"! Thank God for the authors who contribute their time and understanding of God's words to help Christians "be strong in the Lord," as we wait [for] His Return!

Rebecca Glass
Taylors, SC

I do my best to read the current blog every evening and encourage those in my Sunday school class to do the same [https://www.proclaimandd-

efend.org/archives/]. Thank you for all your efforts to post high-quality, scholarly work. FBFI is my "go to" site for sound biblical counsel. . . . I became acquainted with the FBFI as a result of [a] conference at Colonial [Hills Baptist Church, Indianapolis] and so much appreciate all that you do.

Jim Moyer
Fishers, IN

We so appreciate to be able to receive a magazine such as this. The most recent one on "Revival" has been most welcome—in its entirety—but particularly the little column "Preparing Your Heart for Personal Revival: Seven Practical Suggestions" [Sept/Oct 2021].

Monica Baker
Cardington, OH

Thank you for all the good material. I would like to respond to Mark Snoeberger's "What is God's Ultimate Purpose?" article in the Nov/Dec issue. I see the Bible's overall purpose and theme as reconciliation of man to God (i.e., salvation), not glorifying God. Not to say salvation doesn't glorify God, but we're talking about the Bible's primary message. Man parts ways with God in the third chapter of the Bible. God shows His distance from man in Exodus 19 with

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SOUND WORDS

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

FIRST PARTAKER

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

A Whetstone of Fellowship on the Faithful Minister

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Prov. 27:17).

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name (Mal. 3:16).

A divinely designed antidote to isolation and discouragement is to *fellowship*. But perhaps you have few if any kindred spirits with whom you can do so. One of God's greatest gifts to us consists of the rich cache of biographies, journals, sermons, and other writings handed down to us by consecrated, spiritually minded men and women from the past. They being dead, yet speak. Their “fellowship” is sweet and strengthening.

Thomas Manton observed, *Usually books are received as fashions; the newest, not the best and most profitable are most in esteem. . . . Certainly reader, 'tis for thy profit sometimes to look back and consult with them that first laboured in the mines of knowledge, and not always to take up what cometh next to hand.*¹

This column contains the “fellowship” of brothers now in Glory on the subject of the “Faithful Minister.” I've occasionally edited punctuation, but unless otherwise noted, all emphasized words (in bold) are the speakers' own. For the best “feel,” I'd suggest a little mental tweak. Don't read what these men say. Hear it. Just as if you were out for coffee with them (some of them did drink coffee!).

The Scripture passage for our consideration is Jeremiah 17:16a: “As for me, I have not hastened [hurried away, run away] from being a pastor [shepherd] to follow thee.

MATTHEW HENRY

(seventeenth-eighteenth-century English pastor and commentator)

He [Jeremiah] appeals to God concerning his faithful discharge of the duty to which he was called. The people did all they could to make him weary of his work, to exasperate him and make him uneasy, and to tempt him to prevaricate

and alter his message for fear of displeasing them; but, “Lord,” says he, “thou knowest I have not yielded to them.”

*He continued constant to his work. His office, instead of being his credit and protection, exposed him to reproach, contempt, and injury. “Yet,” says he, “I have not hastened from being a pastor after thee: I have not left my work, nor sued for a discharge. . . . Those that are employed for God, though their success answer not their expectations, must not therefore throw up their commission, but continue to follow God though the storm be in their faces.”*²

THOMAS SCOTT

(nineteenth-century English pastor and commentator, friend of John Newton)

*The prophet seems to have been greatly discomposed by the ill treatment which he had received, so that he paused in order to call upon God to heal his wounded spirit, to calm his mind, to subdue his sins, and to quiet his conscience; for God alone could do it effectually. . . . It greatly discomposed the prophet that the people continued to treat his predictions with contempt and derision: they did not and would not believe them to be the word of God till they were fulfilled, of which they saw no probability, and thus they even set the Almighty at defiance. But the prophet could appeal to God that he had . . . patiently continued in the execution of his office as became a public teacher who was a follower of God, and had not been wearied out by ill usage.*³

WILLIAM GURNALL

(seventeenth-century English pastor)

*Consider, that which thou most fearest is **best prevented by thy freedom and holy boldness in thy ministry.** Is it danger to thy life thou fearest? [There is] no such way to secure it as by being faithful to him that hath the sole dispose of it. In whose hands, thinkest thou, are thy times? Surely in God's. Then is it thy best policy to keep him thy*

friend; for, “when thy ways please him, he can make thy enemies to be at peace with thee.” Man-pleasing is both endless and needless.⁴

MAURICE ROBERTS

(twentieth-century Scottish pastor)

“Wait till your best friend turns against you,” said a veteran preacher once to a young minister on the day of his induction. That also may happen and often has happened to faithful men. “Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” [Ps. 41:9]. Good ministers are only experiencing what their Master Jesus Christ suffered when they see their closest friends turning against them. But it is a fearful shock to a pastor to realise that this text is fulfilled in his ears.

Let us not imagine that only little men and petty preachers suffer in these ways. Great men also may go through the same things. Those who know what happened to Jonathan Edwards at Northampton in eighteenth-century America will realise that genius itself is not exempt. Those who are familiar with the way Spurgeon was treated in the Downgrade controversy in Victorian England will be well aware that the greatest preachers in history have not been immune to the wounding of their former friends. There is no trouble like church-trouble—and no alienation is so strong as that of alienated brethren [Prov. 18:19]. Someone somewhere is to blame for every such act of torture practiced on the minister. The great day alone will fully reveal the facts.

Let it be clearly said that no sound or faithful minister should ever resign from his work just because a few clouds have appeared on the horizon. There may well be a time for a good man to flee from a particular place. But he should not act prematurely. “The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling” [John 10:13]. There is room in the ministries of young men for patience, perseverance, long-suffering and agonized prayer. . . . God often puts young ministers to the test. To be faithful in that which is least is to be prepared for greater service.⁵

HUDSON TAYLOR

(founder of the China Inland Mission)

Taylor operated in ministry upon the conviction that it was always best to carry out exactly any undertakings once they had been given. “A little thing is a little thing,” he often said, in his typically simple phrasing, “but **faithfulness** in little things is a great thing.”⁶

HENRY MARTYN

(nineteenth-century missionary to India and Persia who died at age thirty-one)

While at Cawnpore, finding himself unable to preach to the natives, Martyn regularly gathered a crowd of beggars round his bungalow door, and spoke to them of Christ. . . . A noble indirect result was the conversion of a Mahometan

gentleman . . . one of a group who on these occasions listened only to deride. After Martyn’s death he presented himself . . . for baptism. . . . He exchanged a large income for a catechist’s pay of sixty rupees a month; and in due time he received English orders [i.e., entered the ministry]. As his baptismal name he had chosen “Abdool Messeeh,” “Bondman of Christ.” . . . He was Martyn’s one Indian convert; and Martyn never knew him.⁷

HUGH LATIMER

(burnt at the stake, 1555)

Many are grieved that there is so little fruit of their preaching. And when they are asked, “Why do you not preach, having so great gifts given you of God?” “I would preach,” say they, “but I see so little fruit, so little amendment of life that it maketh me weary.” **A naughty answer, a very naughty answer.** Thou art troubled over that which God gave thee no charge of, and leavest undone that which thou art charged with. God commandeth thee to preach!⁸

WILLIAM PERKINS

(father of English Puritanism)

He used to write in the title of all his books, “Thou art a minister of the Word, Mind thy business.”

PHILADELPHIA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

It was in the dread of his spirit that Moses said, “O my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.” Jehovah encouraged Jeremiah when he cried, “Oh Lord God, I cannot speak: for I am a child,” by saying, “Be not afraid.” “I was with you,” said Paul to the Corinthians, “in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling.” Holy fear is useful and not injurious, when it leads to greater faithfulness in the ministry, and to a more entire reliance on the Lord for his assistance.¹⁰

C. H. SPURGEON

Brethren, if I had my choice, I would rather look after a horse than look after a man. The second is much the more difficult animal to manage; and to look after many men—oh, this is indeed a difficult task! I had an old friend, who was for forty years a shepherd, and after that he became a minister; and he lived to be forty years a shepherd in a spiritual sense. I asked him once, “Which was the easier flock to manage?” “Oh!” he replied, “the second flock was a deal more sheepish than the first.” I understood what he meant. They say that sheep have as many diseases as there are days in the year; ay, but men have as many complaints as there are minutes in the year; it is not long that they are free from one malady or another. I mean, men and women, all those that belong to the spiritual flock of which the minister is the shepherd; there is a certain form of trouble arising out of each one. True, there is a certain amount of comfort and joy arising out of every Christian; yet there

is a measure of difficulty that must come to the steward from every one of his fellow servants. It is by no means a position which any man who understands it might desire for himself.¹¹

DAVID MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

We must not mind being thought “narrow.” We must not be afraid of the charge that “You think that you **alone** are right!” Yes, we **do** think that we are right; but we are not alone. The great stream of evangelical witness runs down through the centuries of Church history. The gates of hell have not prevailed and will not finally prevail against it. We believe as our evangelical forefathers did, and we must be prepared for the reproaches of “intolerance” and “bigotry” which they also bore. . . . This charge of intolerance is a compliment. For, surely, if our position is that in which God has ordained His elect should stand, we must necessarily be intolerant of all that would divert us from it. We believe and hold to it. We must be prepared to sacrifice everything for it. . . . We must be humbly aggressive in propagating the true faith, and patiently adamant in the true gospel’s defense—if need be, to the utmost degrees of sacrifice.¹²

J. C. RYLE

Would we know . . . why the ministers who profess to follow the evangelical leaders of the last century are so much less successful than they were? The question is a delicate and interesting one, and ought not to be shelved. . . . I am obliged to say plainly, that, in my judgment, we have among us neither the men nor the doctrines of the days gone by. . . . It is a humbling conclusion; but I have long felt that it is the truth. . . .

We lack both the men and the message of the last century. . . . They fall short **in doctrine**. They are neither so full nor so distinct, nor so bold, nor so uncompromising. They are afraid of strong statements. They are too ready to fence, and guard, and qualify all their teaching, as if Christ’s gospel was a little baby, and could not be trusted to walk alone. They fall short as **preachers**. They have neither the fervour, nor fire, nor thought, nor illustration, nor directness, nor holy boldness, nor grand simplicity of language which characterized the last century. Above all, they fall short **in life**. They are not men of one thing, separate from the

world, unmistakable men of God, ministers of Christ everywhere, indifferent to man’s opinion, regardless of who is offended, if they only preach truth, always about their Father’s business. . . . They do not make the world feel that a prophet is among them, and carry about with them their Master’s presence, as Moses when he came down from the mount. I write these things with sorrow. I desire to take my full share of the blame. But I do believe I am speaking the truth. It is no use trying to evade the truth on this subject.¹³

ANDREW FULLER

Fuller preached on “The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas” in an ordination sermon (October 31, 1787).

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—Maurice Roberts

The Apostle charged Timothy, saying, “Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them,” or, “be thou **in** them.” . . . Your heart can never be **in** those things which are foreign to its prevailing temper; and if your heart is not in your work it will be a poor lifeless business indeed. We need not fear exhausting the Bible, or dread a scarcity of Divine subjects. If our hearts are but kept in unison with the spirit in which the Bible was written, everything we meet with there will be interesting. The more we read, the more interesting it will appear; and the more we know, the more we shall perceive there is to be known. Beware also, brother, of neglecting secret prayer. The fire of devotion will go out if it be not kept alive by an habitual dealing with Christ. Conversing with men and things may brighten our gifts and parts; but it is conversing with God that must brighten our graces.¹⁴

ANDREW BONAR

Dr. Bonar used to tell, with great solemnity, what was said to him at the beginning of his ministry by an old friend and minister: “Remember, it is a remark of old and experienced men, that very few men, and very few **ministers**, keep up to the end the edge that was on their spirit at first.”¹⁵

W. H. BURNS

W. H. Burns was the father of William Chalmers Burns, the Scottish missionary to China who assisted Hudson Taylor, and who also was used of the Lord in a spiritual awakening of Dundee, Scotland. W. H. Burns, the father, was in the words of his biographer (Islay, another of his sons), a *humble*,

unobtrusive, loving, cheerfully serious, and quietly conscientious country clergyman. The following is an excerpt from his last sermon, on the text, *A faithful man who can find?* (Prov. 20:6).

The increase of corruption arising from unfaithfulness must sooner or later bring on judgments. "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me in the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them . . . (Ezekiel xxii. 30, 31).

How lamentable that even among leaders, who should be an example, there are so few faithful: and how is it to be lamented further, that party spirit and mean jealousies should divide those whose professed principles and general objects are the same, and should lead some actually to make common cause with the enemies of spiritual religion. What an unseemly condition! How unlike faithful men and followers of the Lamb!

Be thankful that, though there be few, yet there are some faithful witnesses—a precious remnant, faithful among the faithless—standing up for good principles—raising up, as from the dead, the truths which were in danger of being buried: bringing back, as it were, the spirit of the martyrs of former days, and giving Him all the glory. Let us, I say, bless God for these things, and yet further pray, "Arise, O Lord, and plead thine own cause."

Let the faithful be encouraged, and learn their duty to continue faithful, and not to be shaken in mind nor troubled, though their number be few, for the foundation of God standeth sure. Truth loses not its value, yea, it rather rises in value and brightness when men oppose it. "Men make void thy law," says the Psalmist. What then? He only loves it the more. "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Ps. cxix. 127, 128). The fewer the faithful, the greater the honour of being one of them; a few even in Sardis (Rev. iii. 4).

Let the faithful ones be very humble, because you are so easily shaken, and because you are only in a measure faithful. . . . Even Abraham failed in that very grace in which he excelled. None are completely perfect except the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to him as the author and finisher of your faith. Be jealous over yourselves. Be on your guard against evil. Remember Peter. Remember Lot's wife. Often present the prayer, "Increase our faith." "Follow not at any time the multitude to do evil." . . .

Pray much for the Spirit's blessed influence, that you may be strengthened with all might in the inner man to all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. And now, "Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."¹⁶

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons. You can also access the last month of sermons in your favorite podcast app. Simply search for Mount Calvary Baptist Church and choose "subscribe."

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—David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

¹ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (rpt. James Nisbet & Co., 1871), V, 502.

² *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

³ *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments . . . with Explanatory Notes* (1832), IV.

⁴ *Banner of Truth* (rpt. 1983), II, 580.

⁵ *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, Issue 315 (December, 1989), 2, 3.

⁶ A. J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor & China's Open Century*. Book 4: *Survivor's Pact*, 154.

⁷ H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (1892), 134–35.

⁸ "Sermon on Matthew 22:21" (November 9, 1550), in *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, edited for the Parker Society (1844), 286.

⁹ *The Lives of the Puritans*, Benjamin Brooks (1813; rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), II, 131.

¹⁰ "Circular Letter by Rev. William Staughton" (1807), *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707–1807* (1851; rpt. Particular Baptist Press, 2002), 442.

¹¹ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 41.

¹² "Maintaining the Evangelical Faith Today," IVF Presidential Address at Swanwick, Derbyshire (1952). Quoted in *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, Issue 212 (May, 1981), 24.

¹³ *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* (rpt. *Banner of Truth*, 1978), 429–30.

¹⁴ *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (1845; rpt. Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I, 137.

¹⁵ *Andrew Bonar: Diary and Life*, Marjory Bonar, ed. (1893; rpt. *Banner of Truth*, 1984), 339 footnote.

¹⁶ *The Pastor of Kilsyth*, Islay Burns (1860; rpt. *Banner of Truth*, 2019), 275–76, 278–79.

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

My first introduction to this little classic came about twenty years ago in the form of an advertisement in a Christian news magazine. It was a full-page ad for the book, and most of the space was taken up with one of the prayers in the collection. Not many advertisements make me want to pray. That one did. When I read through the prayer in the ad, my immediate reaction was, “I really want to pray that!” The first thing I did was to tear out the advertisement and tuck it into my Bible to work into my devotions over the next few days. The second thing I did was to buy a copy of *The Valley of Vision*. Compiled by Arthur Bennett and published by Banner of Truth in 1975, it’s still easily accessible.

No book other than the Bible has had a more profound impact on my praying. It is not a book *about* prayer. It is a book *of* prayer. “The book is not intended to be read as a prayer manual,” Bennett explains in the Preface. “The soul learns to pray by praying.” The book is a collection of over two hundred prayers, arranged topically, from men like Baxter and Bunyan, Brainerd and Spurgeon, Isaac Watts and Thomas Watson. The prayers are spiritually mature, scripturally saturated, and deeply encouraging.

One of the most heartening features for me has been to read (and pray) the prayers of other men who, though far godlier than I am, wrestled with the same kinds of things I have often struggled with in my praying—failure, unfaithfulness, shame, unbelief, coldness of heart. They model how to find our way back to the throne of grace, by leaning heavily and trustingly on the only thing that gives us access into God’s presence in the first place and in any case:

Continue to teach me that Christ’s righteousness
satisfies justice and evidences thy love.

Help me to make use of it by faith as the ground of my peace
and of thy favour and acceptance,
so that I may live always near the cross.

It is not feeling the Spirit that proves my saved state,
but the truth of what Christ did perfectly for me.

“The strength of Puritan character and life,” notes Bennett, “lay in the practice of prayer and meditation.”

Of all hypocrites, grant that I may not be an evangelical
hypocrite,
who sins more safely because grace abounds,
who reasons that God cannot cast him into hell for he is
saved,
who loves evangelical preaching, churches, Christians,
but lives unholily.

Every prayer occupies just one page and has been put into a form that invites thoughtful, meditative prayer. “Each prayer consists of a number of main clauses with subsidiaries that illuminate and enlarge the subject. In this way an opportunity is provided for pauses and reflections”—and, I would add, expansions, modifications, and personalizations. Many of my margins are filled with additional lines inspired by the original wording, occasional word changes, and, yes, sometimes even slight theological alterations.

Which brings me to one last recommendation. The book is available in a beautiful little leather version; but I do not recommend it, because I do not think it’s as conducive to this book’s greatest value. I recommend the paperback because I like to encourage people to use it as a kind of personal prayer workbook. My paperback has nice, wide margins that leave room for editing, amending, and expanding on the prayers so that they become personalized prayer expressions and meditations. And since reading a prayer in an advertisement is what first persuaded me to acquire the book, I can’t think of a better way to end this review than with a sample (mildly edited).

O Thou that hearest prayer, teach us to pray.

May Your Spirit help our infirmities,
for we know not what to pray for as we ought.

May we never be importunate for merely
temporal blessings,
but always refer them to Your fatherly goodness,
for You know what we need before we ask.

May we never think we prosper unless
our souls are prospering,
or that we are rich unless rich toward thee.

Grace us to seek first Your kingdom and its
righteousness.

Grace us to value things in relation to eternity.

May our spiritual welfare be our chief concern.

May we be poor, afflicted, despised . . . and have
Your blessing,

rather than be successful
or have more than heart could wish,
or be admired by our fellow-men,
and forget You.

Grace us to seek our happiness in Your favor, Your
likeness, Your service, and Your presence.

And may we experience more fully and more
consciously

the truth of your promise that whoever seeks, finds.

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Worshipping God on the High Places?

Worship wars have been going on since Genesis 4, when God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s. Since then, God has given us multiple examples of worship in the Bible—some acceptable, some not.

One of those examples involves King Manasseh of Judah. Manasseh is notorious in the Bible for being a wicked king. Yet there was a watershed moment in his life when God chastened him. As a result, Manasseh humbled himself before God and sought to make changes in how Judah would worship God.

Second Chronicles 33 tells us briefly of these things. But there is a curious statement in the middle of the chapter that tells us that amidst the reforms, “the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only” (2 Chron. 33:17).

WAS THAT ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP TO GOD?

High places were literally places on the ground that were higher than others. They were used in worship by the pagan Canaanite peoples. “At these places of worship the people sacrificed animals (at some high places children were sacrificed according to Jer. 7:31), burned incense to their gods, prayed, ate sacrificial meals, and were involved with male or female cultic prostitutes (2 Kings 17:8–12; 21:3–7; Hos. 4:11–14)” (“High Place,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*).

When God instructed Moses regarding the conquest of Canaan, He said, “Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places” (Num. 33:52).

Again, in Deuteronomy 12, God emphasizes this for the Israelite people, telling them that they must not only destroy these heathen places of worship, but also that He should be worshipped at the place He appoints for them.

Worshipping God on the high places was adopting the pagan form of worship. God’s people were to worship at the tabernacle, then the temple in Jerusalem. God gave the instructions regarding not only how He was to be worshipped, but also where He was to be worshipped.

During Manasseh’s reign the temple was still standing and perfectly capable to receive people for the proper worship of God. In fact, 2 Chronicles 33:15–16 tells us that Manasseh had removed the heathen objects of worship, repaired the altar, and made sacrifices to God upon it. However, the people chose not to follow him. They worshipped God according to their own desires, which was not sanctioned by God. Therefore, what these Israelites did was an unacceptable form of worship that went against God’s Word.

When considering proper worship to the Lord, there are three general categories of consideration.

First, we must worship the proper object. There is only one true and living God in this universe. Jehovah is His name. He alone is the proper object of our worship. Jesus said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). Therefore, our worship must be completely and thoroughly monotheistic. This aspect of worship is generally not a problem for conservative/fundamental churches today.

Second, we must worship with the proper heart. The heart of worship includes a heart of humility and sincerity. It is worshipping “in spirit” (John 4:24). An authentic worshipper is not someone who is true to his own heart, but one who is true to God’s Word, one who worships God with the kind of heart that God desires. As Paul wrote, offering ourselves as “living sacrifice[s], holy, acceptable to God” is our reasonable service of worship (Rom. 12:1). This is an issue that worshippers must evaluate themselves before God. If our worship is merely ritualistic, then it mimics more of a pagan worship than it does biblical worship.

Third, we must worship in the proper way. At no time in human history has mankind been left to worship God according to his own whim or fancy. We cannot approach worship in a way that focuses on what we would like but rather on what God has said He desires. This is the part of worship that is particularly under attack today. Does the style, or form, or manner of our worship matter to God?

Did it matter when Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire (Lev. 10:1–3)?

Did it matter when Ananias and Sapphira deceptively gave their offering (Acts 5:1–5)?

I would submit that the manner in which we worship is just as important to God as is our heart in worship. God used Nadab and Abihu as an object lesson for all Israel at the beginning of the tabernacle age. God also made an example of Ananias and Sapphira at the beginning of the Church Age. God intended to communicate to His covenant people of Israel, as well as to His church, that how we worship Him must be in keeping with biblical truth, not according to our own whims or personal desires.

While we can applaud Manasseh’s attempts to reform the worship of Israel after his horrible period of idolatry, we cannot overlook the fact that at least some of God’s people were attempting a syncretistic form of worship—using pagan worship forms in the worship of Jehovah. This was not acceptable to God.

Today we must guard our churches and our personal lives from doing the same. Religious syncretism is never justified, nor honored by God. He will be glorified. Let us fear Him and worship only Him with the right heart and in the right way.

Taigen Joos pastors Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire.

A few people have made a name for themselves because they are specialists in their field. We all have names that come to mind when we think of athletes who have distinguished themselves in a particular sport—winners of a Cy Young Award, a Heisman Trophy, the Gold, or League MVP. Some have excelled in the military, especially those who have risen to the rank of a five-star general or admiral. Only a dozen men in US history have ever held this rank (or its equivalent). Others have distinguished themselves in the fields of science or medicine, particularly those who have won a Nobel Prize. I can remember one of my seminary professors being in awe of a man who could read Egyptian hieroglyphics like he was reading a newspaper—another example of a true specialist in his field. We tend to think of these people as having raw talent or natural abilities. But perhaps many of them would simply say they worked hard and persevered to accomplish what they did.

The Word of God uses the imagery of an athlete and a soldier to describe what our perspective ought to be concerning the Christian life. In both cases endurance is emphasized (2 Tim. 2:3; Heb. 12:1). Suffering usually accompanies the Christian life, and we must endure both the normal, daily trials and inconveniences as well as the additional, weighty circumstances we call suffering. Like those specialists mentioned in the previous paragraph, we must work hard and persevere (with God’s help) to accomplish what we can in the Christian life. Are you willing to endure hardship like athletes or soldiers do?

But another point ought to be made here beyond endurance. People have become specialists because they worked to develop themselves by increasing their knowledge and honing their skill. Are we not told (in the parable of the sower) that of those who receive the seed on good ground, some produce thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold (Matt. 13:23)? Similarly, are we not told to be careful to build on our foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones rather than wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:10–15)? Should we not strive to produce a hundredfold for the cause of Christ? Should we not take care to use the best materials to help build God’s Kingdom?

Both the fruit produced by the good ground and the material used to build on our foundation are references to the good works of believers. Of course, we are not saved by our good works (Eph. 2:8–9), but God has created us to produce good works as a testimony of our salvation—and more importantly, to bring glory to Him (Eph. 2:10). If unbelieving athletes, soldiers, or professors can work to increase their knowledge and hone their skills in their field, how can we as Christians do anything less for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom?

ATHLETICS

As previously stated, Scripture speaks of engaging in the Christian life as one would engage in a footrace (1 Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1). Since I probably know more about a car racing than foot racing, I will choose a different example from the world of

athletics—one in which I hope to make a clearer comparison. If you have ever played golf, you are aware of the subtle “tactics” that golfers use to affect the trajectory of the ball as they advance toward the green, and finally, the hole. I say “subtle,” because those tactics are not readily apparent to those who have never played the game. The golfer’s stance, position relative to the ball, choice of club, grip, and type of swing are all elements that factor into a golfer’s strategy. If the golfer is teeing off (or still has a long distance to get to the green), then he will choose a driver, align his nondominant (front) foot with the ball, and position himself further away from the ball in order to achieve a low trajectory and maximum distance. If he has an approach shot, then he will choose a wedge, align his dominant (rear) foot with the ball, and position himself much closer to the ball to achieve a higher trajectory and shorter distance. The angle of the face of the club helps to produce the shot’s lower or higher trajectory. In addition, the golfer’s swing contributes to the accuracy of his shot. If he is trying to avoid a tree or a sand trap, then he may “hook” or “slice” the ball. If he is on the green, then he will choose a putter, analyze the terrain, and putt the ball according to the “break.” Professional golfers spend many hours perfecting every type of shot, and so they become specialists in their sport. And we marvel at the precision of their shots.

WARFARE

Scripture also speaks of engaging in the Christian life as one would engage in warfare. We are called soldiers of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3–4). We are told to put on the armor of God (Eph. 6:10–17) and “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). In this category, I believe the topic of firearms training will give us the illustration we need. If you have ever received firearms training or participated in a shooting competition, you are aware of the fundamentals of marksmanship that shooters use to keep the bullet “on target.” Similarly, these fundamentals are subtle, because they are not readily apparent to those who have never shot a gun before. The shooter’s stance, grip, aim, trigger control, breathing, and follow-through are all elements that factor into a “hitting the bullseye.”

These fundamentals are intended to minimize movement and maximize focus in order to give the shooter as precise a shot as possible. If we are talking about shooting a pistol, which would be relatively close to the target, then a shooter will be primarily concerned with his grip, aim, and trigger control. He is going to wrap both hands around the grip (frame) of the gun, with his nondominant hand over his dominant hand—both hands pushing toward each other to help minimize the recoil. Then he will place both of his thumbs along the side of the frame, pointing forward, with his dominant thumb on top of his nondominant thumb. When he is ready to shoot, he will place the index finger of his dominant hand on the trigger so he can pull the trigger straight back without moving the pistol to the left or right. If the shooter is right-handed, and the placement of his

finger is not correct, he may “push” the gun to the left or “pull” it to the right. The correct position of his finger on the trigger will depend on the size of his hand and the kind of gun he is using.

The shooter will also work to perfect his aim. He may begin by shooting with one eye closed, but eventually he will get to the point where he can shoot with both eyes open. His aim will also be enhanced by locking his wrist. An experienced shooter will combine these elements of grip, trigger control, and aim to perfect his shooting technique. How important are these fundamentals? If the shooter is twenty feet from the target and the muzzle of the gun is off center by a quarter of an inch, he will miss the bullseye by more than four inches.

If we are talking about shooting a rifle, particularly at a long distance (like a sniper), then the shooter will need to master all these elements and more. For precision with long-distance shots, the rifle is usually stabilized on a table or on the ground, and often the shooter will use a brace. The shooter will breathe in a deliberate way to lower his heart rate, and then he will shoot between heart beats. Other factors include “windage and elevation,” as well as temperature and humidity. If the shooter has a moving target, as in the sport of trap, then he may modify his shotgun with a particular type of choke. But his main concern will be to quickly analyze the trajectory of the clay pigeon and have the proper lead in order to “kill the bird.” If someone is shooting skeet, he will have to react more quickly since he has two birds (coming from different directions) to analyze and shoot. Those who train often, either because they compete or their line of work depends on it, will learn to perfect their shooting. As I write this article, the Olympic Shooting Sports competitions are taking place. One cannot help marveling at the shooting precision displayed during these games.

APPLICATION

If the Christian life is compared to warfare or athletics, then what is the implication for us? Are we not “called” to be as disciplined in our Christian experience as the athlete or soldier? Are we not told that bodily exercise has some profit, but exercising ourselves to godliness is of greater importance (1 Tim. 4:8)? Does not the Christian life demand the same kind of precision in our “practice” and “approach”? Should we not seek to do God’s will primarily because we want to please the One who enlisted us as His soldiers—whether it is easy or not (2 Tim. 2:3–4)? Should we not discipline ourselves to walk in the Spirit

(Gal. 5:16) and put to death the deeds of the flesh (Col. 3:5)? Should we not seek to develop such “tactics” as we engage in our Christian life?

Let me be more specific. Preachers of a former generation spoke of “knowing how to load the gospel gun and shoot it.” Do we as preachers develop our sermons with precision? What are we doing to make sure that our main point(s) and application are “hitting the bullseye” of the heart? Are our Sunday school teachers preparing their lessons with the same kind of precision and goal? What about our speech? Have we thought through what our Christian conversation should sound like, both in our tone and selection of words? Should not our speech be “always with grace” (Col. 4:6) and contain “that which is good to the use of edifying” (Eph. 4:29)? Do we “tell it like it is,” or are we sensitive to the feelings of others? Have we taken the time to research and develop how we would discuss various biblical themes or doctrines with a Roman Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, or Muslim? Do the people in our congregations really know what they believe (1 Pet. 3:15)? Do they know where to find key doctrines in the Bible? Are they able to discuss such things with skill? Are they convinced of the importance of this? Are they working to discover and develop their spiritual gift(s)? Are we attempting to be proficient in living the Christian life—with the discipline of an athlete or a soldier?

May the Lord help us as we prioritize and exercise our Christian responsibilities.

Dan Seibert pastors Northside Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.



The poster features a background image of the Grand Canyon. At the top, the International Baptist College and Seminary logo is displayed. The main text reads: "YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN OUR ANNUAL GRAND CANYON HIKE". Below this, the dates "APRIL 6-8, 2022" and "APRIL 12-14, 2023" are listed. At the bottom, it says "WELCOME TO OUR BACKYARD! MORE THAN A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW". The footer contains contact information: a phone icon with "1-800-IBC-4858", an email icon with "INFO@IBCS.EDU", and a website icon with "IBCS.EDU".

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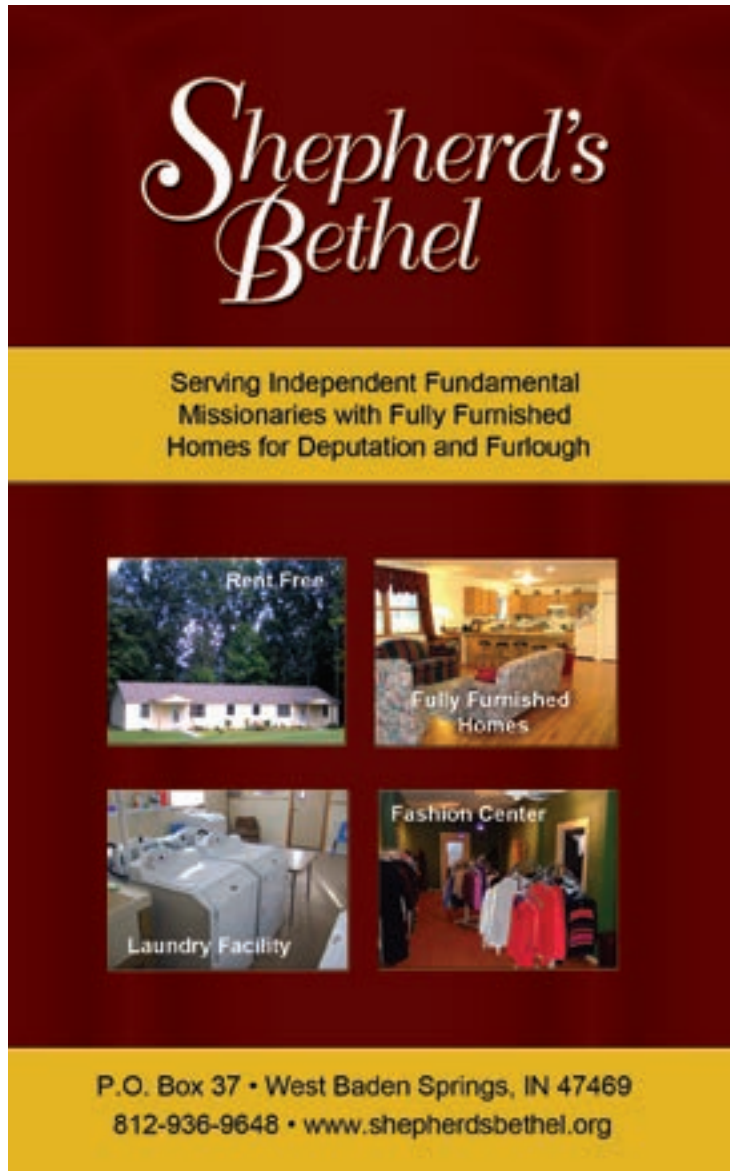
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I go to lots of funerals these days. I collect funeral programs, about fifty of them in a top drawer in my office, from recent years. These funerals honor Christ, for whom my highly esteemed and now departed older friends have lived. The Christian community here in Greenville, South Carolina, is very large with so many older, outstanding, and humble servants of the Lord. They have served Christ in local churches, on mission fields, in educational ministries, and in a variety of other ways. Some I have served with shoulder to shoulder for years. Some took me under their wings. Their homegoing reminds me that time is short and that we must finish well, by God's grace, and for God's glory.

I visit cemeteries too. In the last year I have twice visited my dad's gravesite near Dothan, Alabama, including on Father's Day weekend. My wife and I placed there some flowers, a plaque, and two small American flags. Dad was a World War II veteran. He served in Europe. What a fine father he was. There are five generations of McAllisters buried at the Big Creek Methodist Church cemetery, going back to my great-great grandparents. Dr. Bob Jones Sr. taught school and preached at the church for a time in 1900, and he talked about it in a 1955 chapel message. He very likely touched the lives of my ancestors back then. How amazing! My dad finished well. Dr. Bob Sr. finished well. Will you and I?

Last summer my wife and I and her ninety-year-old mother visited the gravesite of my wife's father in Leonardo, New Jersey. Those are tender moments of reflection. He faithfully served as pastor of the same church nearly for sixty-one years. Last May I attended my godly aunt's funeral in Gainesville, Florida, and her graveside service at the Wellborn cemetery. My mother's parents and grandparents are buried there. It is especially sobering to walk quietly among the headstones, gravestones, and epitaphs of people with whom you laughed

and loved. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Until the Lord comes again or calls us home, we must make the most of this life's opportunities for Christ. We must finish well. If we do, we have so much to look forward to in heaven.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LATER-LIFE CHOICES

We must make later-life choices to finish well the course of God's will for our lives.

Life is a gift from a gracious God. Life is a stewardship, all of it, from start to finish. For the believer it is full of gospel purpose propelled forward by the promises and provisions of God. But this life will soon come to a close, perhaps sooner than we think. Heaven will soon be our joy and our gain (Phil. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:1-9). And we will give a full accounting of our lives to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10). Surely it is true: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Are we going to waste some of our best years in carnal, sinful, worldly, self-centered living?

Paul was determined to finish well God's plan for His life: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). He knew that he was facing trouble if he went to Jerusalem, but he went ahead, trusting God. The trouble that he encountered actually became the platform for his "jail" ministry to authorities (cf. Acts 9:15) in Caesarea by the sea and all the way to Rome itself (Acts 21-28). Trouble and difficulty often become platforms for ministry when viewed correctly. Some of the church's most Christ-centered, life-related theology comes from the Prison Epistles written during Paul's Roman confinement of Acts 28. Ultimately Paul said under inspiration several years later, "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7). How can we finish well?

Refle

ctions and Resolutions on Finishing Well



We must make later life choices to honor and serve the Lord faithfully.

Faithfulness is an attribute of God. He is faithful in the absolutely highest possible sense. He is repeatedly declared to be faithful (Deut. 7:9; Lam. 3:23; Isa. 49:7; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 1:9; Heb. 10:23). We can be full of faith toward Him because He is entirely trustworthy. His faithfulness to us begets our faithfulness to Him.

Faithful people are sorely needed today in Christian enterprise. God wants men and women of integrity, ethics, and industry who will carry out the assigned task with energy, enthusiasm, and endurance. He desires we invest all of our God-given resources to make gain for God. He wants us as stewards to turn a spiritual profit for the kingdom and glory of God. He wants servants who are reliable, dependable, trustworthy, and faithful. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

We should be faithful in

- Our personal commitment to fellowship with the Lord in the Word and prayer.
- Our personal commitment to our spouse, children, and parents.
- Our commitment to our church and its worship, services, support, prayer, missionaries, ministries, and outreach.
- Our commitment to our employer by being loyal, productive, effective, and efficient.
- Our commitment to our nation at all levels—local, state, and national—praying for its leaders, using our influence for righteousness, and paying our taxes.

We must make later life choices to serve the Lord fruitfully.

In John 15:1–17 Christ is preparing His disciples for coming days of fruitfulness. The face-to-face fellowship they enjoyed with Him was soon to change. Jesus would die, rise again, and ascend to His Father. Their relationship with Him would actually deepen by His disappearance. He implored them to continue to fellowship with Him in a heart-to-heart

relationship—to abide in Him. Faith, following, fellowship, friendship, and fruitfulness—this is the pattern of the true disciple. Each true disciple has one life to live productively, fruitfully for the glory of God. There is at first fruit, then more fruit, much fruit, and lasting fruit—that which satisfies and sweetens. It is Christlikeness (Gal. 5:22–23) and conversions (cf. John 4:36; 14:12; Rom. 1:13). George Reith says in his commentary on John’s Gospel, “It is the entire and various outcome of the Christian life; Christian character, conduct service; active and passive virtues; a consecrated manhood; body, soul, and spirit possessed and penetrated by the Spirit of God. It is the life of Christ conveyed into us by His Spirit.”

The Psalmist says, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Ps. 92:14). The upper years should be golden years of much fruitfulness of years of living for Christ, enjoying a harvest of a life well lived. I see my older brothers in Christ still serving Him with all their hearts. Retired Pastor Tony Miller amazes me with his wise and tireless leadership in missions. Jim Starr continues enthusiastic for world missions in India and just returned from a fruitful evangelistic effort in Africa. Ken McKenzie from my home church remains focused upon winning souls to Christ. Retired Pastor Jonathan Edwards has the vision of a young man and talks as though he will live to be a hundred, still going hard for the Lord in Utah. Retired Pastor Roger Vogel, along with his wife, just completed an extended season as the interim pastor near Cody, Wyoming, and saw the Lord do great things there and a new pastor called. Perhaps the Lord will give many others a “second wind” of blessed service for Christ bearing much fruit. We should be experiencing great fruitfulness in these upper years!

We must make later life choices to serve the Lord fervently.

Though we may not have the full energy of our youth, we can still have an inner intensity that comes from the Holy Spirit. The Bible encourages us to be

- *Fervent in Spirit*: Not slothful in business; *fervent* in spirit; serving the Lord (Rom. 12:11).

- *Fervent in Prayer*: The effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16b).
- *Fervent in Love*: And above all things have *fervent* charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).
- *Zealous in Good Works*: [He] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, *zealous* of good works (Titus 2:14).
- *Earnest about Spiritual Gifts*: As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10).
- *Earnest in Obeying God’s Word*: Therefore we ought to give the more *earnest* heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Heb. 2:1).
- *Earnest in Contending for the Faith*: Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should *earnestly* contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

May God enable us by His grace to finish well the course of life that He has set before. May we strive to have God’s final approval on our lives!

My favorite epitaph is found on the gravestone of Dr. Bob Jones Sr. Would we not all love the Lord to bestow such an accolade on our lives?

*A fight well fought
A race well run
The faith well kept
A crown well won*

Bruce McAllister has invested his life in preparing men for the ministry. He served at Bob Jones University for over forty years, primarily working with the ministerial class, church staffing, and student outreach ministries. He now serves as director of ministry relations for Gospel Fellowship Association Missions and oversees the new GFA church-staffing website. See gfamission-sjobs.org and gfamissions.org/ministry-relations for more information.





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More Value than Many . . . Angels?

I know that I have worth; Christ's agonizing death is an unmistakable indication of that fact.

But I do wonder when I've messed up again—and yet again. Do I have value on this earth, or must I wait until heaven to feel His regard for me? I so need a logical foundation to rely on, not my fickle feelings.

The Bible tells me that I can know the truth of Christ's love for me every day. Luke 12:7 declares that “even the very hairs of [my] head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; [I am] of more value than many sparrows.” Sparrows? Those ubiquitous small brown birds that are everywhere you look in the spring and summer? The city park gourmards of breadcrumbs and such? *Well, I think, of course I have more value than those pesky birds!*

But there is another way to know that I have value to God. One day the Lord started me on a train of thought that goes something like this:

Genesis 1:27 states that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.” Using the poetic construct of chiasmus (repetition of elements in reverse order) the writer emphasizes the image-bearing nature of man. The writer of Hebrews 2:6–7 first wonders that God is even “mindful of [man]” but then notes that “Thou [God] madest him a little lower than the angels.” I have intrinsic value because of my creation.

Through Christ, believing man is made “[an heir] of God, and [a joint-heir] with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Heirs—not by virtue of household position as Abram's servant would have been without Isaac—but through the righteous sacrifice and bountiful mercy of God the Father I have inherited the riches of heaven equally with His

own Son, Jesus. I am not only a “daughter of Eve” as C. S. Lewis states, but also a joint heir with Christ!

I am superior to the angels in another way. First Peter 1:11–12 picture the Old Testament saints poring over the messianic prophecies to understand their relevance to their own times, but the prophets learned that “that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you . . . which things the angels desire to look into.” The plan of salvation was designed for the redemption of fallen mankind. There was no plan for the redemption of the fallen heavenly host. The advent of Christ itself was a thing that must have been mystifying to the heavenly host though they spoke obediently about its wonder and value to humanity. As I write this we have just celebrated Christ's coming to earth, and we wonder at the condescension of God Himself to take our form, live a sinless life, and die a substitutionary death. What must the angels have thought, those who know firsthand the glories of heaven and the majesty of the Godhead? Certainly, the crucifixion perplexed them. So they long to examine salvation just as the disciples peered intently into the tomb to see if the news of the resurrection were true, and as the prudent man is told to peer into the mirror and go away changed by what he sees (James 1:25). It seems from the verb

“long” that angels are kept from the fruition of that desire. But *I* am permitted not only to know the plan of salvation but also to participate in it!

My part in the plan of God—from creation to heavenly glory—tells me that I am highly esteemed by my Heavenly Father. But 1 Corinthians 2:7–10 crowns the truth that I matter to God. Salvation is the “hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (v. 7). But this wisdom is greater than just the act of salvation, for there are many “things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (v. 9). One of those things is the revelation of Himself and His greater plans; “God hath revealed them unto us [His children] by His Spirit” (v. 10) through His Word.

So, whenever I look at a verse and think, “Wow, I never saw that before,” or, “Oh, that's what that means!” my Heavenly Father is telling me through the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He illuminates God's love letter to me, that I am of more value than many sparrows—and angels. And so are you!

Karen Rowe Jones, long-time member of the English department at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, now ministers around the country with her husband, Dr. Bob Jones III, chancellor of Bob Jones University. She is grateful for the Lord's patience with and everlasting goodness to her.





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MIDLIFE TRANSITION TO VOCATIONAL MINISTRY

Continued from page 13

with chicken pox! We were all miserable. While at our destination, we were T-boned by a speeding red sportscar. The point of impact was right where my sister was sitting. By God's grace we all walked away from the wreck, but our GMC minivan was horribly mangled. A few days later, I was playing at a relative's house and I broke my arm quite badly. X-rays at the ER confirmed that my arm would require reconstructive surgery. I had to be put under anesthesia and my parents stayed with me that night in the hospital. It seemed like things were getting worse and worse! I remember my dad sharing his thoughts about the whole situation later. The Lord was clearly trying to get his attention.

When we got back to Phoenix, my father said "yes" to the Lord's direction for his life and enrolled at International Baptist College. While taking college classes, my father balanced a very demanding career, various volunteer ministries at our church, and leading a family of four kids (two more who came along later). I am not sure how my dad did it all. But, by the grace of God, and probably some understanding college professors, Dad finished his ministry degree in 2003. I was twelve years old and he was forty-one. Soon after, he was ordained and began full-time ministry as administrative pastor and principal of a Christian school.

It was an exciting time for me when my dad quit his important corporate job (he had the corner office!) to become a pastor. It was probably a terrifying time for him. Dad was always good with money, but

even as a kid I noticed when our family went from a six-figure income to an assistant pastor's salary. God always provided. We always had enough to eat and clothes on our backs. My parents put all six children through Christian school and four through college (the last two are still in college)—an expensive proposition for any family. God pays for what He orders!

Dad explained to us after dinner one night the implications of being the family of a pastor. People would be looking at us as an example. There were some things that we could not do or had to stop doing, not because they were necessarily wrong, but because we did not want to be a stumbling block to someone else. Dad never wanted the behavior of his family to be the excuse for another family to do wrong.

As a part of that same conversation, Dad suggested that he would be home more since he would not have such a long commute anymore and would not have to work such long hours like he did in his previous job. Boy, was he mistaken! When dad worked in the business world, his schedule was very regular, almost like clockwork, but ministry doesn't work like that. When people call because they need counseling or because they're in the emergency room with a family member, a pastor goes, no matter the time! I remember thinking to myself a few months after that conversation, "Dad isn't home more, he's home less!" Ministry was demanding, but Dad loved it. He was always ready to drop everything to go help someone. I remember multiple occasions where he took my brothers and me to go help someone move,

IT WAS AN EXCITING TIME FOR ME WHEN MY DAD QUIT HIS IMPORTANT CORPORATE JOB (HE HAD THE CORNER OFFICE!) TO BECOME A PASTOR. IT WAS PROBABLY A TERRIFYING TIME FOR HIM. DAD WAS ALWAYS GOOD WITH MONEY, BUT EVEN AS A KID I NOTICED WHEN OUR FAMILY WENT FROM A SIX-FIGURE INCOME TO AN ASSISTANT PASTOR'S SALARY. GOD ALWAYS PROVIDED.

repair their house, or do yardwork. There were other times when he missed dinner, and Mom would tell us that Dad was visiting someone in the hospital. As a family, we adjusted to the irregular schedule.

TRANSITION TO HEAVEN SOONER THAN EXPECTED


After Dad had been in full-time ministry for only six years, the Lord saw fit to call him home to glory in November 2009. Dad was leading a men's retreat on an off-road adventure. My youngest brother, through no fault of his own, drove the wrong way when the road split. The road he took collapsed, and the vehicle holding my dad, my brother, and two other men from our church plummeted to the ravine below. None of the vehicle occupants survived the crash.

Dad died doing what he loved—ministry. Not many pastors can say that. Though Dad had only been in ministry for a short time, thousands of people came to his funeral. In order to fit everyone in, we had to have his memorial service in the auditorium of a church much bigger than our own! It was amazing to hear the stories and see the faces of all the people my dad had impacted for eternity. I know of at least one person who accepted Christ as a result of my father's funeral. I know of at least a couple more who are in ministry because of him. I will never know, on this side of eternity, exactly how many lives my dad impacted for Christ, but it was certainly thousands. All glory to God!

There is so much more about my dad's life that I wish I could share. Times of victory, and yes, times of defeat. There are many poignant lessons I learned from him, some of which I'm still learning. Though my father had a sinful life prior to salvation, God used him. Though his path to ministry took longer than most, his ministry was very productive. All thanks go to God, who guides us faithfully through the unexpected transitions of life for His glory.

After graduating from BJU in 2013, **Tim Waycaster** served on staff at Ironwood Camp in California. He currently serves on staff at Northwest Valley Baptist Church as administrative assistant. He lives in Phoenix, Arizona, with his wife, Jillian, and two sons.





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Prayer Predicaments:

Have you ever prayed Psalm 58:6 for unbelievers: “Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth”? Or how about Psalm 140:10: “Let burning coals fall upon them”? What do we make of these imprecations? What are we, as Christians living in the NT light of loving our enemies, meant to do with these kinds of prayer expressions in our Bibles? Kidner (*Psalms*, 25) puts it bluntly: “The sudden transitions in the psalms from humble devotion to fiery imprecation create an embarrassing problem for the Christian, who is assured that all Scripture is inspired and profitable, but equally that he himself is to bless those who curse him.”

Imprecatory prayers are pleas for God to judge the wicked, sometimes in very graphic terms. They are surprisingly common in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms (e.g., Pss. 3, 12, 35, 52, 58, 59, 69, 70, 83, 109, 137, 140). Jeremiah occasionally expresses similar sentiments (e.g., Jer. 18:19–23). Some argue that such imprecations are emotionally charged hyperbole. Others have insisted that such prayers against one’s enemies are not merely ill-informed, but sinful and sub-Christian. C. S. Lewis wrote that

we must not either try to explain them away or to yield for one moment to the idea, that because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious. We must face both facts squarely. The hatred is there—festering, gloating, undisguised—and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves (*Reflections on the Psalms*, 142–43).

This might be more defensible if such imprecations were infrequent anomalies “corrected” by the later, more mature perspective of the psalmist. But such a conclusion is not an option if we take seriously a scriptural, orthodox, and consistent view of inspiration and inerrancy.

One mistake we must not make is to think that loving and showing kindness to one’s enemies is a uniquely NT exhortation. Imprecatory prayers do not represent an OT spirit that is at odds with a NT spirit. Both OT and NT invoke a love for one’s personal enemies. And both OT and NT echo the justice and righteousness of God’s judgment on the wicked. What are some scriptural principles that can shape and guide our thinking about these sometimes uncomfortable examples of biblical prayer?

IMPRECATORY LANGUAGE IS SOMETIMES METAPHORICAL

In his final self-defense, Job asserted, “I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth” (29:17). Agur described

those “whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men” (Prov. 30:14). Similarly, prayers that God would, for example, break the teeth of the wicked (Ps. 3:7; 58:6) are much more likely to be metaphorical references to “de-fanging” the wicked, debilitating their capacity to harm the righteous, than literal requests for the dental rearrangement of one’s enemies.

IMPRECATORY PRAYERS ARE AFFIRMATIONS OF GOD’S HOLINESS

Despite his ill-advised diagnosis, even C. S. Lewis recognized in such imprecations the echoes of a righteous hatred of evil: “We can still see, in the worst of their maledictions, how these poets were, in a sense, near to God”; “something of the Divine voice can be heard in these passages” so that “the ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that it is hateful to God” (*Reflections*, 147–48). Calvin put it more simply: “Because [the psalmist was] devoted to the cultivation of piety, he thoroughly abhorred all impiety.” Vindication should not be confused with *vindictiveness*. David’s imprecations display the former, not the latter: “What he asked of God was no more—and could certainly be no less—than the verdict and intervention which a victim of injustice could expect from him, David himself, as king of Israel. The more seriously he took his ideal of kingship from God . . . the more unthinkable it was that he should slander Him by underrating His abhorrence of evil” (Kidner, *Psalms*, 27). This observation of David’s royal authority suggests another observation.

IMPRECATORY PRAYERS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF MEEKNESS AND DEFERENCE

We forget who David was. He was not just a “sweet psalmist.” He was a warrior and a king. He had the ability to destroy anyone he wanted—a prerogative he rarely exercised in his own defense. Rather than acting vindictively, his prayers that *God* would deal with his enemies displays a meekness that submits his circumstances—and his enemies—to God. In other words, “they direct their fury to the right person, the God of justice and vengeance” (Klein, et al., *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 353). Read Psalm 94:1–7, 20–23. This recognition is rooted in one of the most sermonically famous of OT texts (Deut. 32:35) and echoed in the NT (Rom. 12:17–21). It also explains what might otherwise appear, on the surface, to be an argument against all such imprecation (Luke 9:54–56).

Is Imprecatory Prayer Appropriate?

IMPRECATORY PRAYERS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH AND CONFESSION

An imprecation is an acknowledgement that God's self-revelation about His nature and intentions to judge wickedness are trustworthy—that the wicked will certainly be punished because God says so. Beyond that, it acknowledges that those intentions are entirely right and good and just. It is both foolish and arrogant to suppose that we are more compassionate and therefore more righteous than God. The true believer confesses with God the evil of sin and acknowledges the justice of judgment (Iss. 66:24). Each series of judgments in Revelation is punctuated by worship scenes that celebrate the righteousness of His actions (Rev. 11:17–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–6; 18:20; 19:1–4).

IMPRECATORY PRAYERS ARE THE VOICE OF CHRIST

David was a prophet who not only spoke by the Spirit of Yahweh but who spoke Yahweh's words (2 Sam. 23:1–2). Peter informs us that the Spirit in the prophets was none other than the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:10–12), and the NT confirms repeatedly that Christ is the Yahweh of the OT. Moreover, Christ authorizes the imprecatory psalms by citing them frequently. Read Psalm 69:22–28. That's pretty severe. Now back up and read the verses immediately before that—69:20–21 is undeniably messianic. That gives new meaning and weight to the idea that such imprecations are “the voice of Christ.” There are also other OT examples of imprecatory prayer (e.g., Neh. 4:4–5). The bigger question is, does the NT countenance such prayers?

IMPRECATORY EXPRESSIONS CONTINUE IN THE NT

Imprecations express “the plea that justice shall be done and the right be vindicated. This is a concern which the NT warmly upholds” (Kidner, *Psalms*, 26). Imprecations are not foreign to the NT (1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8–9). Such statements cannot be attributed to a less spiritually mature Paul; 2 Timothy 4:14 stands in vivid contrast to 4:16 (cf. Ps. 28:4). Other passages that may not qualify as imprecations *per se* nevertheless convey unequivocal pronouncements of certain judgment on false teachers, rather than compassionate prayers for conversion (see 2 Pet. 2 and Jude). An explicit prayer for vindication surfaces in Revelation 6:9–10. The fact that this prayer is offered by those who have died and are, therefore, glorified and beyond the reach of any harm (and sin!) lends even *more* weight to the appropriateness of imprecatory prayer, not less. The ultimate

issue at stake in imprecatory prayer is the judgment of evil and the vindication of right.

Another example of imprecatory prayer can be seen in Revelation 8:1–6. After a breathless silence of half an hour, a censer filled with incense *and the prayers of the saints* (8:3–4) is flung to the earth, resulting in thunderings, rumblings, lightning flashes, and an earthquake . . . and *the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to blow*. The progression of the passage “shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the trumpet judgments come in answer to the petitions” (Robert Thomas, *Revelation*). It is easy to miss the very basic point that when the seal is broken, it reveals only what was *already written in the document to be performed*; and what has already been recorded there—which Jesus the Lamb alone has the right and worthiness to execute—are the prayers of the saints which must be answered. What are these prayers, that issue in the ultimate unleashing of divine retribution on the inhabitants of the earth, but imprecatory prayers for God's justice to be manifested? The judgment expressed in what this seventh seal unleashes (through the seven trumpet and seven bowl judgments) is the answer to the prayers of vexed and persecuted saints who long for God's justice and glory to be displayed.

CONCLUSION

How are we to harmonize biblical examples of imprecatory prayers with prayers of forgiveness? We can't jettison imprecatory prayer as an outmoded OT concept now contrary to the gospel, since we have NT examples of imprecation as well. The fact that imprecatory prayers are sometimes appropriate seems beyond question, since we have not only OT but also NT examples of them. A holistic hermeneutic suggests that there may be times when it is appropriate for Christians to pray for God to deal in judgment with the enemies of God. Determining *when* such prayer is appropriate is more complicated. This principle, at least, seems clear and consistent throughout Scripture: imprecatory prayer is not appropriate for merely personal rivals or out of private animosity but only for the inveterate enemies of God, God's people, and God's truth. There may be times even for the NT believer when it is appropriate to pray imprecatory prayer, but it would always be appropriate to qualify such a prayer with a submissive deference to God's greater wisdom and magnanimity of character.

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

Disconnect ... Change ... Reconnect

Life transitions: the very thought still sends a shiver down my spine. I hate moving, and I hate starting all over again—making new friends and learning where everything is located. Joan and I would agree that each transition we have made was initially very hard but in time, very fruitful.

After I was called to preach, God called me to Canada. In the fall of 1996, we decided it was time to take a survey trip to Canada to see if this was clearly what God wanted us to do. I contacted all the mission boards I was aware of and discovered that the majority of Canadian missionaries were on either coast, so we decided we would explore the central western part of Canada. We got an atlas and wrote down every city with a population of 50,000 or higher in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta, and began to pray over that list regularly. I took off on a two-week survey trip, calling all the missionaries I was aware of in those three provinces and staying with them.

It was an eye-opening trip, revealing that there were not any self-supporting churches of our stripe in Alberta or Saskatchewan. As I was traveling, I was made aware of a missionary in Edmonton, Alberta, who wanted to talk with me. I met him and he immediately let me know he had severe health issues, had not driven a car in three years due to eye surgery, and needed to retire. He then asked me to take his place. We were not planning to make a move for four years, and yet here was a pastor of ten people, all over the age of sixty, asking us to come before the next winter. He then asked if I would like to see the church property. This intrigued me, as everyone else I had met in the three provinces was meeting in schools or community centers.

So to make a long story short, God made it clear we were to go. We raised support, and the following fall (1997) we started the

twenty-four-hour trip from Bolingbrook, Illinois, to Edmonton, Alberta. My parents came along to help drive vehicles. Several hours into the journey the U-Haul truck broke down, so we all hung out in a park in a strange town while mechanics worked on the truck.

Pastor Herb made arrangements for us to rent a house unseen. We arrived to find four different types and colors of carpet in our new home—green, orange, rust, and brown. However, it was exactly where God wanted us to live for our first few months in Edmonton.

I decided to go door-to-door, covering my block and the outside block. I met Tim and Kelly, our next-door neighbors. They had been living together and had two kids, and we had two kids at the time. We started a Sunday school for our two kids and asked if we could bring their kids to Sunday school with ours. They saw this as free babysitting, so they agreed. We ended up having them over for dinners and games. It was not that long before we had the privilege of seeing both of them come to Christ. They began growing, and after five months I decided it was time to talk to them about what the Bible says about living together. When I finished showing them what the Bible said, they told me that I was the first person in their entire life to tell them living together was wrong. All their friends lived together. Both of their parents had encouraged them to live together. I told them to just pray about it and left the verses I had shown them on a card. The next day, Tim called me and told me that the Bible was clear so he slept in the basement that night. He then asked if he could come stay with us until they could get married. He moved in with us, and two months later they got married.

In addition, as I was going door-to-door, I met a couple on the backside of our block.

Coming from Chicago and being new to the area, I was wearing a white shirt and a dark tie, which I would soon come to understand made me look like a Mormon to those here in the West. The couple's garage door was open, and Reg told his wife Helen to go talk to me loud enough for him to hear. Once he found out I wasn't a Mormon, he invited me up to the garage. We hit it off, and I found out they were both nonpracticing Catholics. Due to a bad church situation, Reg had told his wife she could no longer go to church. Reg was a mechanic who worked out of his garage, so I hired him to do some needed work on my cars to make them compliant in Canada. He agreed to let Helen come to our church, which she began doing every Sunday. After about four Sundays, she asked Joan to show her how to be saved, and Joan had the privilege of leading her to Christ. Reg, on the other hand, was much more of a challenge. However, five years later in the middle of a blizzard, Reg asked to meet with me. As we sat down in my office, Reg told me he could not take it anymore. In spite of the fact that he was a mean drunk, his wife had been nice and kind, and he wanted to become a Christian as well. Reg has been my real-life example of 1 Peter 3: 1—a husband who was not won by the Word but by the lifestyle of the wife.

These were some of the first people to get saved when we first arrived in Canada. Though the transition was hard, even one person getting saved would have made it all worth it.

I highly recommend a book called *Decisions, Decisions* by Dave Swavely. Once you know God is leading you to make a transition, which is the most important first step, then you know it must be for furthering His kingdom in some way. Transitions always give you a completely new group of lost people to witness to. May we take advantage of finding creative ways to connect to and share the gospel with our new neighbors the next time a life transition comes our way.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June 2015. Previously 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 start a Christian school and a Bible institute.

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News From All Over



Charles Richard Nelson Sr., age 89, of Chillicothe, Illinois, entered his heavenly home on August 7, 2021, due to complications from COVID. He pastored four churches in Illinois and then served as missions director of the Association of Independent Churches of Illinois for ten years, retiring in 2018. Jan, his wife, survived the COVID virus and remains to faithfully pray for their twenty-six grandchildren and thirty-one great-grandchildren.

Pastor Art Zacher and his wife, Melodie, will be retiring to Greenville, South Carolina. From 1999-2022 Art was pastor of Berean Baptist Church in Fairfield, California. Previously he was involved in starting churches in Connecticut and New York and was principal and teacher at several Christian schools. His book *Keys to the Kingdom: Parables of Jesus*, which he co-authored with Doug Peterson, is scheduled to be released by Westbow Press in March or April of this year. Art plans to continue writing books and enjoying his grandchildren.



Mailbag

Continued from page 20

thunder, smoke, and threats to man lest he approach. Then we have God's efforts to meet with man through the tabernacle, the temple, and to speak to mankind in person in a less threatening way than Mt. Sinai, through the person of Jesus. The law books tell man where he goes wrong, and the prophets plead for him to return to God with repentance, faith, love. These are all messages to humanity on what to do about that distance, Christ being the way. Hebrews 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 seem to summarize the Bible's

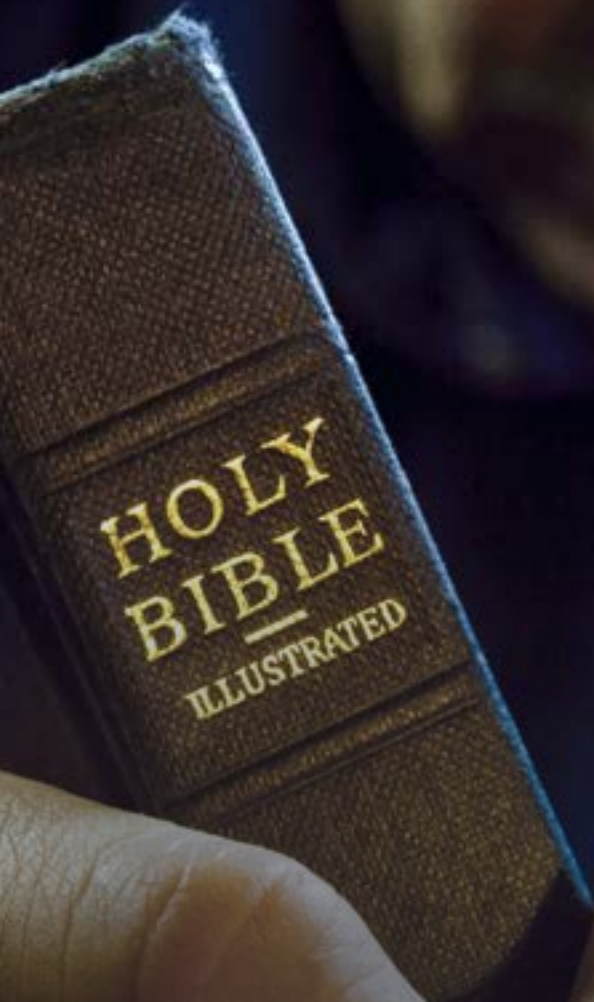
message as salvation. And the very end of the Bible quotes Jesus saying, "Yes, I am coming quickly," as if to say "We are back together!" Frankly, if a preacher at church were to say, "Glory to God, Joe Shmoe is now in hell," I couldn't get out of that church fast enough. Not saying Mark S. would advocate saying that from the pulpit, but it seems to me pointing out [that] God is equally glorified by people rejecting Christ could lead there.

Michael Fox
Alton, IL

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Subjective Relativism and Religious Accommodation

I hope that when a post mortem on the COVID pandemic is eventually done, it will reveal how postmodernism manipulated COVID to assault two bastions of Western culture: science and religion. I am not a scientist; so I will not speak to the damages done to science. But I am a minister of the gospel, a chaplain in the military, and I have witnessed how subjective relativism weaponized COVID to attack religion—or, more specifically, religious liberty. It has been the military process for seeking religious accommodation against vaccination that has, perhaps unwittingly, revealed just how committed our Republic is or is not to this ideal of religious liberty.

The process for religious accommodation in the military is relatively similar across all the branches. A service member approaches his chain of command and asks to be accommodated for a religious belief. Usually the command defers to the unit chaplain to guide the service member and the command through the process. It is often believed that the chaplain decides, but the chaplain has no authority to grant or deny any request for religious accommodation.

The chaplain's role is to interview the service member and write a letter to the requestor's commanding officer detailing the nature of the request, the sincerity of the requestor's beliefs, and whether or not other less restrictive means might be available. Depending on the authority delegated to the commander, a decision granting the accommodation can be made; but, if the commander does not have the authority to grant the request or would rather the request be denied, the commander can forward the request up the chain of command with his or her recommendation. Often, commands will entrust the chaplain with

overseeing the timely processing of these requests.

Accommodations typically come in four very broad categories: observances of worship and holy days, dietary practices, uniform and grooming standards, and medical waivers. Though commanders do have some approval authority delegated to them, waivers to major policy requirements require the attention of the requestor's service chief. For example, immunization accommodations and accommodations requiring deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) specimen sampling are all forwarded directly to the respective service chief. Regardless of the type of request, local commanders must submit their recommendation to the cognizant service chief, with whom the final authority for approval or disapproval rests.

When determining whether or not to grant or recommend granting religious accommodation, commanders are required to consider each request individually, factoring in things such as effect on military readiness, unit cohesion, as well as the importance of the request to the service member, the impact of repeated accommodations of a similar nature, the availability of alternative means to accommodate, and precedent the accommodation might set.

In August 2021 the Secretary of Defense issued a memo ordering all members of the Armed Forces to be vaccinated against COVID 19. With this order, requests for religious accommodation rose exponentially. For example, in just 2020, my command processed two requests for religious accommodation. Between August and September, my command processed fifteen requests, all in response to the vaccine order. According to CNN, by the second week of January 2022, the US Army had

received 2128 requests and the Air Force surpassed them with 2387. The Navy has had 3038 requests, and the Marine Corps has processed the highest amount with 3350. To date, only the Marine Corps has granted any accommodations. They have granted two. Meanwhile, the Army has denied 162 while the Air Force has denied 229. The Marine Corps, on the other hand,



though granting two accommodations, has processed 3212, so it can only be assumed that all of those have been rejected. The Navy has yet to publicly acknowledge how many requests it has processed; but, so far, every request has been disapproved. Even with disapproval, the matter is not settled. A service member does have the right to appeal the decision, or he can officially refuse vaccination and risk separation, or he can comply and be vaccinated. Meanwhile, litigation has begun and the vaccine order is being challenged in the

courts. The point is, the process is ongoing and far from being conclusive. So, we wait.

As we wait, it might be beneficial to assess the efficacy of the process. By doing so, I think it will reveal that some practices have manifested themselves—practices that have the potential to permanently alter the esteem we have historically held for religious liberty. To be fair, I do not believe individuals are intentionally attacking religious liberty. But I do think what is being done will have unintended consequences—consequences that result when conflicting perspectives informed by subjective relativism reach their logical conclusions. It is to these consequences that I think we should be concerned.

The first area of concern is for the use of religion as a pawn by those who simply wanted to avoid getting the COVID vaccine. All the branches of the military placed a deadline for all personnel to be vaccinated. Because a service member



with a pending medical or administrative request (which includes religious accommodation) could delay action until his request is fully adjudicated, some wary service members began shopping around for opportunities to remain unvaccinated. If medical exemption proved impossible, they turned to the next available option—religious exemption. Though they claimed to hold a religious belief, the belief was actually political (they disliked how the vaccine was advertised), or medical (they did not trust the efficacy of the vaccine), or

practical (they did not like how the vaccine was rolled out). Few actually have had a viable religious reason. For those who did pursue a religious exemption, the reason was often uninformed or was inconsistent with other practices in their life. Scripture was often misapplied or taken out of context and theology was manipulated to fabricate a pseudo-religious belief in hopes of avoiding doing something they did not want to do.

On the other hand, the military establishment has often struggled to differentiate a sincerely held religious belief from just a belief. The ability to navigate this area introduces the second area of concern that has manifested itself in response to religious accommodation. Do matters of conscience have the same protection under the law as tenets of organized religion? To its credit, the military treads very carefully on these distinctions and does have policy that defines “religious practice” as any exercise of religion, whether or not compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief. But, the key is that a belief must be for the purpose of exercising religion and not merely a matter of conscience. But how can the military discern between things done out of political, practical, or religious motivations; and, what about those who adhere to no formal religion or to religion at all? It could be argued that all beliefs are either religious beliefs or things believed religiously. So, does something believed religiously carry the same weight as a religious belief, and does the military have the ability to differentiate between the two? Constitutionally, does the government ever have the right to determine the sincerity of religious beliefs of any of its citizens? You can quickly see the implications that answers to these questions have for religious liberty, and these questions are being discussed at all levels of the chain of command as well as by chaplains, staff judge advocates, and even the medical personnel responsible for administering the vaccination.

A third concern is for how the vaccine has been used to guarantee military readiness but at the expense of religious liberty. As long as religious persons serve in the military, there will be a conflict between religious beliefs and requirements, and considering the military’s primary mission

is readiness not religion, this conflict is magnified. Commanders are instructed to approve requests for accommodation of religious beliefs when accommodation will not adversely impact “mission accomplishment, [and] military readiness.”

So commanders must make utilitarian decisions for the greater good of their command, even at the expense of an individual’s accommodation. On a larger scale, the service chiefs have to decide what is in the best interest of their respective service. These are unenviable positions to be sure. It is for this reason (military readiness) that most, if not all, of the vaccination requests for religious accommodations have been disapproved. The reasoning is sound, but it is also true that the military has valiantly accomplished mission for more than a year of the pandemic when no vaccine was available. That fact is worth some consideration when determining the validity of the argument favoring vaccination for sake of military readiness at the expense of religious liberty.

With the prevalence of denials for religious accommodation, it might seem that the entire process is an exercise in futility. But it is not. There is a positive upshot to all of this. First, it has re-energized the discussion of the importance of religious freedom to our Republic. Second, it has given chaplains a platform to speak about faith. Finally, it has revealed, at least to those who cherish truth, the entrenchment of subjective relativism in our culture. We have found that beliefs do not have to be sincerely held nor do they actually have to be religious nor do they actually have to be true. They just need to be “your truth.” Conversely, “your truth” might actually bring you into conflict with an amoral, impersonal, irreligious system that has its own pragmatic mission. It is in that space—the space between the cog and the gear—where loyalty to mission conflicts with loyalty to the soul of man and where religious freedom is counterbalanced by perceptions of military readiness. It is in that space that the military chaplain operates. I hope a post mortem will reveal that we fought relentlessly in that space.

Tavis J. Long is a military chaplain serving Norfolk, Virginia.



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Isolation and Indifference in the Local Church

Before I begin addressing this issue, I want to state that there are many godly people who are not able to attend church services because of health problems. They deeply love the Lord and would be in church if they could. So I am not referring to these individuals. I want to speak of many Christians who purposefully neglect attending a local church. They do not perceive the danger of doing so. There are actually two dangers in this.

The first danger is isolation from God's people. Several months ago I was watching a TV program about how wild animals hunt for their prey. It showed a large group of gazelles feeding with their young ones. In the tall grass lions were hiding and watching them. The lions watched and waited patiently until they saw a young gazelle stray from its mother and the herd. The lions then pursued the gazelle until they caught and devoured it. The gazelle's isolation from the herd led to its disaster.

The Word of God says in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." The wicked one is lying in wait to devour the straying Christian. Matthew Henry, in his commentary on this passage, states, "Concerning the devil . . . he is a roaring lion hungry, strong, cruel, the fierce and greedy pursuer of souls. By his business: he walks about, seeking whom he may devour; his whole design is to devour and destroy souls. To this end he is unwearied and restless in his malicious endeavors; for he always, night and day, goes about studying and contriving whom he may ensnare to their eternal ruin." What a sobering observation of the work of the

devil! Hebrews 10:25 strongly encourages us in assembling with fellow believers by declaring, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The word "exhort" means "to urge by earnest appeal." For example, when I played football and baseball in high school, we would exhort and encourage each other as teammates. It gave us confidence as a team playing together to win the game. There is strength in numbers. This is true of the local church as well.

The second danger is indifference to the local church. A good friend of mine told me recently of a conversation he had with a friend, whom he was seeking to encourage. My friend asked, "Do you go to church?" His friend, who is supposed to be a believer in Christ, said, "I don't see the need of the local church." I have personally talked with Christians who have said they don't go to church because churches are full of hypocrites. Others have said they don't go to church because they can worship God in their own private manner. Others have said they don't attend church because all the preacher talks about is money and politics. The excuses are numerous of why many Christians neglect church services. But are these sound reasons for not assembling with a local church? No, because they go directly against the teachings of the Word of God! Who is the Head of the church? The Scriptures declare that it is the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Acts 2 states that on the

day of Pentecost three thousand men were saved under Peter's preaching. Then we read what these men did after they were born again in Acts 2:41: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Then verse 47 says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." These three thousand men were added, with others, to the church. Then the Lord gave pastors to shepherd the church, as we see in Ephesians 4:11-12: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The pastor is to teach and edify Christians so they will grow and mature in the Scriptures. Romans 10:17 states, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." We read God's command to pastors in 1 Peter 5:2, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." I am grateful that there are many local churches whose congregations see the significance of weekly meeting together in worshipping and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us in Ephesians 5:27, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

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

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