

July/August 2022

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

## Technology and Social Media

- ▶ Proverbs on Social Media
- ▶ What Happened in Virginia?
- ▶ Power and Pitfalls in Using Technology in Ministry
- ▶ The News Is Great—So Innovate

# FRONTLINE

Volume 32 • Number 4



## 4 PROVERBS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

*Gordon Dickson*

Can we help the next generation withstand the negative influences of social networking? Yes, the Book of Proverbs shows us how.

## 8 A GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ONLINE LANGUAGE

*Cullen Johnson*

A bewildering array of terms confronts and sometimes confuses us in our brave new online world.

## 12 WHAT HAPPENED IN VIRGINIA?

*FrontLine Editors*

What happened in Virginia was a spiritually motivated grassroots effort.

## 14 POWER AND PITFALLS IN USING TECHNOLOGY IN MINISTRY

*Robert A. Conduct*

Technology can enhance our service to both God and people, but there are certain pitfalls that need to be identified and avoided.

## 16 BOOK REVIEW: 12 WAYS YOUR PHONE IS CHANGING YOU

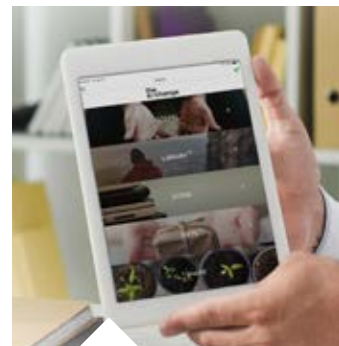
*Rodney King*

How has the smartphone affected humanity, and has it affected humanity for the better?

## 18 WHAT ABOUT "VIRTUAL COMMUNION"?

*Don Johnson*

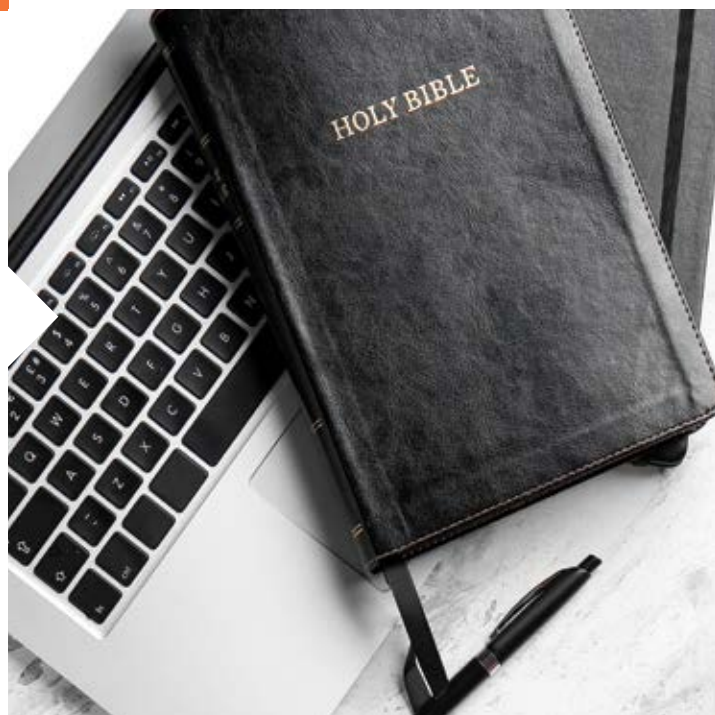
Now that the COVID crisis is winding down, some may still wonder about creating some form of communion for shut-ins and those who can't attend regular services.



## 22 THE NEWS IS GREAT—SO INNOVATE

*Jeff Musgrave*

The question is not *if* we should use technology to share the gospel; the question is *how* should we use it?



Our sincere thanks to Dr. Gordon Dickson for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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online at  
***proclaimanddefend.org***



## DEPARTMENTS

### 20 MAILBAG

#### 28 HEART TO HEART

An Empty Closet  
*Vera Jones*

#### 30 AT A GLANCE

Prophetic Praying  
*Layton Talbert*

#### 32 WITH THE WORD TO THE WORLD

Necessary Reminders  
*Jim Tillotson*

#### 34 ON THE HOME FRONT

#### 34 NEWS FROM ALL OVER

#### 35 REGIONAL REPORTS

#### 36 CHAPLAIN'S REPORT

Rewarding, Fulfilling, and Fruitful  
*Larry Robbins*

#### 38 BOOK REVIEW:

*The Trustworthiness of God's Word*  
*Robert Vincent*

#### 39 EVANGELIST'S PERSPECTIVE

A Solemn Warning  
*Jerry Sivnksty*

# Technology and Social Media

**W**hat should you do when Mr. Potshot vents his spleen? What is a meme? What happened in Virginia? How can you use digital technology to share the gospel? What is "FOMO," and is it catching? When you get right down to it, how is technology affecting us? And does Scripture give us any guidance about how to approach technology and social media?

In this July/August edition of *FrontLine* magazine, our authors answer these questions and more in ways that will help you minister to others.

The Book of Proverbs imparts wisdom in commonsense ways. These pithy sayings were designed to impart "street smarts" to naïve and foolish people. They contain timeless principles about social interactions that are still relevant to social media. Scientific studies have shown that online social networking can dominate one's thinking for extended periods of time. The article "Proverbs on Social Media" will help you to learn how to answer fools on Facebook and keep from falling for online flattery. When we are insulted, the Scriptures also teach us how to respond without taking revenge.

Yes, each new day really does seem to bring a puzzling array of new online terms. What is phishing? What do you call those advertisements that look like news articles? What is shadow banning, and who are the SJW's? Cullen Johnson will give you clear definitions in "A Glossary of Frequently Used Online Language."

What happened in Virginia? In a remarkable turn of events, conservative Christians were elected to statewide offices in Virginia in 2021. This happened despite the fact that well-funded liberal groups were determined to dominate the state (again). How did this

stunning turnaround take place? The editors of *FrontLine* magazine will introduce you to the pastors and evangelists who made a difference in Virginia. Their practical advice could help you make a difference in your state as well.

Robert Condict will help you step back to look at technology in perspective. Can new technology help you serve others? Are there ways that it could enslave you? "Power and Pitfalls in Using Technology in Ministry" will help you answer the question, "Who is the master and who is the slave?"

And while we are doing tech talk, what about those smart phones we are carrying around? Are we using them, or are they using us? Rodney King reviews the book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, and you will find his article enlightening. No one can say that the smartphone revolution has not affected humanity. Go to any public place and watch the people who are staring at their phones instead of talking to their friends. What gives? Find out in this interesting review. And what are we to think of the emphasis of those who promote "virtual communion?" Don Johnson gives us some concise points to ponder.

So when you get right down to it, can all this technology be used for good purposes? In his article "The News Is Great—So Innovate!" Jeff Musgrave will show you how others are using digital and online media to share the gospel. The fact is that many ministries are using electronic means with an online presence in powerful ways. What if you could too?

We hope this edition of *FrontLine* magazine will help you teach others about technology and social media.

Gordon Dickson

Gordon Dickson



# Proverbs on Social Media

In 1962 an MIT professor wrote the first description of what we now call “the Internet.” He envisioned “the social interactions that could be enabled through [computer] networking.”<sup>1</sup> Long before Facebook’s launch in 2004, those who designed the World Wide Web anticipated these social interactions. So what we now call “social media” (and “social networking”<sup>2</sup>) grew naturally out of this fertile ground. In 2017 experts estimated that there would be more than 3 billion active users on social media by 2021. In fact, there were 4.62 billion social-media users in January 2022—just over 58% of the world’s population.<sup>3</sup>

But a recent article in the *New York Post* noted that “Gen Z is social distancing—from social media. . . . Some twenty-somethings are taking a stand against all-consuming apps such as TikTok and

Instagram. Calling them ‘toxic’ and ‘obsessive,’ these young people say they’re regaining control of their time by stepping away from the scroll.”<sup>4</sup> Users of all ages could learn something from this new generation. How could we change our ways? As believers, we could use scriptural proverbs to help the next generation transform their thinking to withstand the conforming influence of social media.

## WHAT CONTROLS YOU?

It is gratifying to see that members of this younger generation are awakening to some of the problems presented by social media. They are learning about the way that social media can affect someone. Chamath Palihapitiya, the former vice president of Facebook in charge of user growth, put it this way: “I think



we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works. The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops we've created [including the hearts, likes, and thumbs up of various social media channels] are destroying how society works.”<sup>5</sup> By referring to “dopamine” he described a normal chemical produced by the neuro-transmitters in the brain. But science has been able to demonstrate that certain behaviors produce an abnormal amount of this substance—often leading to addiction. On social media this obsession has been called “longing for likes.” There is also the “FOMO” problem. (See the glossary in this edition.) Do you want anything like this to control you?

Many individuals and ministries use social media to publicize their ministry work and encourage fellow believers. That's great. But each of us must examine our motives to be sure that we are not ensnared by the power of social media. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 the apostle Paul expressed his personal desire that nothing would dominate him. How could someone tell if social media had begun to dominate his life? Writing for bigthink.com, Paul Ratner described it this way: “Social media has become a ubiquitous part of our daily life. We check our phones about 80 times a day or once every 12 minutes, according to some estimates, and a large part of that is spent on interacting with Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media sites.”<sup>6</sup> Think about that when you

waste hours on that new Facebook game, Twitter poll or “clickbait.”

### CHANGING YOUR MIND

If social media controls you this way, how would you go about changing your mind? Part of personal change, as described by Paul in Ephesians 4:22–24, is this important step: “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” It's important to remember that there is a difference between reading the Scriptures and renewing your thinking with the Scriptures. Renewing requires concentration—biblical meditation as described in Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8. Slowing down to meditate is quite a change of pace from the distracting, multitasking world of social media. Yet turning the words of Scripture over in your mind is an essential step to change your thinking. So are you mesmerized by memes? Or are you meditating on the message of Scripture?

### PONDER THE PROVERBS

Perhaps you have been on social media and questioned why others don't use common sense. Why would they like that thread on Pinterest? Why do they check social media at all hours of the day and night? How do they get dragged into protracted disputes and “flamewars”? Why aren't they thinking about what their posts look like in the eyes of all their acquaintances or “friends”? The Book of Proverbs was written to give what we call “common sense”

to those who are naïve, foolish, and critical (Prov. 1:4, 22). And you have to admit that social media seems to abound with all three! The point is that, as believers, we could use Scriptural proverbs to help the next generation transform their thinking to withstand the conforming influence of social media.

### FOOLS ON FACEBOOK

*“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit”* (Prov. 26:4-5)

What do you do when “Mr. Potshot” vents his spleen? You know the feeling. Someone slanders your good name. Or they are cynical about your success. Or she pukes out her personal poison on people. Maybe they are trolling you. Maybe you get irritated with his insults. Or she attacks those you love or respect, and you want to take her on. But you are afraid that you will only make the situation worse if you speak up. What should you do? It's bad enough if someone says it to your face, but what if he says it on Facebook? If she taunts you in person, it's one thing, but what if she taunts you on Twitter or insults you on Instagram?

A survey revealed that “more than half of the UK population claim to be contemplating revenge, and social networks are the preferred platform for getting even.”<sup>7</sup> “A fifth (22%) said their preferred outlet for revenge would be through Facebook.”<sup>8</sup> “Exasperated with workmates, frustrated by politicians, infuriated by bankers, envious of shallow celebrities, we all have moments when the blood boils.”<sup>9</sup>

In fact, “evidence is growing that forms of incivility—e.g. aggressive and disrespectful behaviors, harassment, hate speech and outrageous claims—are spreading in the population of social networking sites’ (SNS) users. Online social networks such as Facebook allow users to regularly interact with known and unknown others, who can behave either politely or rudely. This leads individuals not only to learn and adopt successful strategies for using the site, but also

**THE BOOK OF PROVERBS WAS WRITTEN TO GIVE WHAT WE CALL “COMMON SENSE” TO THOSE WHO ARE NAÏVE, FOOLISH, AND CRITICAL (PROV. 1:4, 22). AND YOU HAVE TO ADMIT THAT SOCIAL MEDIA SEEMS TO ABOUND WITH ALL THREE! THE POINT IS THAT, AS BELIEVERS, WE COULD USE SCRIPTURAL PROVERBS TO HELP THE NEXT GENERATION TRANSFORM THEIR THINKING TO WITHSTAND THE CONFORMING INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA.**

## A PROVERB ABOUT PRAISE

**A**s the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise" (Prov. 27:21). This proverb could help those who are "longing for likes" or feeling the pressure to look for praise via social media.

The first part of this proverb uses an illustration from the science of metallurgy. Silver ore and gold ore, in their natural state, are of questionable value. Until the ore is placed in the fire and melted down, it is impossible to remove all the impurities. This is why the psalmist prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23–24). The words "try me" describe the process in Proverbs 27:21 ("As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise"). In Psalm 139 David prayed, "Search me" (a reference to digging as in a mine, described in Job 28:1–3), "try me" (purification by fire), and "lead me" (how to use those talents and treasures you discover).

The Lord "takes us through the fire" in a sense. This is painful, but it leads to purity—causing us to become

more like the Lord. But is this merely something that happens to us? Or are we supposed to participate in this process? Proverbs 27:21 raises questions that each one of us must answer. How do I respond to praise? Whom do I praise? And what do I praise? These are significant questions for each of us. The way you think about your praise tells you a lot about your ways. And what you approve with your praise proves a lot about you.

If you crave this praise, be warned. When people know that you rave over this praise, they can control you. By their flattery and compliments, they can move you around like a token on a game board. Charles Bridges gave us a great illustration of this danger. He said that those who know that they carry gunpowder around with them will keep fire at a distance. So, he said, "It is a dangerous crisis when a proud heart meets flattering lips" (*Proverbs*, 521). This is especially important in your use of social media. Those who flatter you are after something. Treat their praise like a fire to examine the motives of your heart. The refiner uses fire, like a wise man uses praise, for purifying his desire, finding value in the blaze.

to condition their own behavior on that of others."<sup>10</sup>

When you read Proverbs 26:4–5 together you are faced with a puzzle: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."

The biggest question is this: *Are you supposed to respond to a fool or not?*

From these two proverbs, it is clear that there is no "one size fits all" answer. They do not contradict each other; these proverbs form a paradox. This seeming contradiction is designed to stimulate your curiosity. So let's investigate. These will help you when you are faced with foolish talk on Facebook, cynicism on Snapchat, or taunts on Twitter.

*Don't answer a fool according to his folly.* Fools despise wisdom and knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 22). Not only will they spout their folly, but they will do it with "attitude." Keep this in mind, especially online. Fools don't just have their facts wrong, their entire focus is wrong. They don't show respect in the fear of God (Prov. 1:25). Fools will use every form of trickery or mockery to put you down and be popular with their "friends." Now, you may have

your facts straight. But you have to look at the greater danger: becoming like them.

If you lash out like the jester, you will be just like him. Let's face it, there are some people who irritate you more than others. So you will have to give this one some careful thought. If that fool's folly makes your blood boil, then refuse to react. Don't act like a fool on Facebook. Don't imitate the one who irritates you. Be what you want him to become, or you will become like him.

But here is the problem. If everyone takes the approach described in verse 4, then there will be no help for the fool. In fact, he may insist that he is right because no one can answer him. This is where the second proverb comes in.

*"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."*

Do you love that "Facebook friend" enough to show him the way of wisdom? If you can do this, but refuse to do so, the fool will flounder in his folly. He is wise in his own mind, but nowhere else. Will you show him the error of his ways? You can do so by being an example to him. Rather than rebuking him in front of all those on his newsfeed, why not send him a private DM/PM? Start by asking questions rather

than making accusations. Don't assume that he said what he meant. Be prepared to back up your answer, but look for something you need to learn along the way.

*If you can answer the folly of a fool without becoming like him, do so.* Here is the answer to our puzzle. If you can respond without reacting and answer without an "attitude," then you may turn the fool from his folly. Practically speaking, you may need to remain silent when the fool first spouts his folly. But it may be that after you begin to comment on a post, you see the folly of others. You will have to choose wisely as to whether or not to continue to comment. In either case, as Marcus Aurelius wrote, "The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury."

**Gordon Dickson** has served as the lead pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, since 1994.



<sup>10</sup>"Brief History of the Internet," Internet Society, 1997, describing the memos of J.C.R. Licklider, accessed at <https://www.internet-society.org/internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet/>.

Continued on page 20

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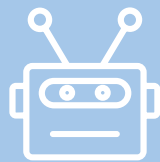
# A Glossary of Frequently Used Online Language

**A** bewildering array of terms confront us in our brave new online world. It's almost like a new Gnosticism, where those in the know communicate in a secret code. To bring some clarity, we offer these definitions. (There are many more—see the links at the end of this article.)

**AI.** Artificial Intelligence. In technical terms, AI is a system that “learns” by trial and error or by human data input to make decisions that are more nuanced and complicated than a purely logical or mathematical decisions. (For example, AI enables computers to recognize faces or objects in images; it allows YouTube to find and flag copyrighted music or images in uploaded videos.) The term “AI” can also refer to personal assistant technologies, such as Google Assistant, Alexa, Siri. Many articles make the mistake of conflating “AI” with any computer program that makes a yes-or-no decision.

**Algorithm.** In general terms, an algorithm is simply a logical solution to a problem, or the plan for how a computer program works. In the YouTube context, creators talking about “the algorithm” are usually referring to how YouTube determines what videos to suggest to someone visiting YouTube.

**AMA.** Ask Me Anything. This is a directed discussion popular on chat or forum-style social media sites such as Reddit, Slack, or Twitter. A user hosts an “AMA” by introducing himself and announcing a time he will be available to answer questions. Usually these kinds of discussions are hosted by a well-known influencer or by someone who has an interesting story.



**Bot/chatbot.** An AI-controlled account that automatically posts to social-media sites or chat rooms. Bots can be used for a multitude of good purposes, such as helping answer common questions, but they are also commonly used for less-than-good purposes such as spreading propaganda, selling products, and influencing people who may not realize that the account is not a real person.

**Brigade.** Brigading is when an account with a moderate-to-large following encourages users to flood into another user's page or another forum. Sometimes this is with good intent, such as trying to help boost a friend's audience, but it can also be used as a means of abuse.

**Clickbait.** The obnoxious trend of news providers or advertisers to write extremely compelling articles so that unsuspecting Internet users will click on them—or even better, share their links.

**Conversion Rate.** A marketing term; the measure of how many website users make it to the provider's desired outcome (such as subscribing to a newsletter or clicking on a certain link).

**Cross-channel.** A marketing term; generally refers to posting the same message to multiple social-media sites or building a consistent brand across multiple sites.

**Crowdsourcing.**

A type of website that allows users to raise funds for a cause or project online; for example, GiveSendGo, Kickstarter, and Indiegogo.



**Cyber-bullying.** A general term for online abuse.

**Dark social.** A marketing term for social media traffic that is not easy for a marketing team to track, such as links in a private messaging app or email.



**Discord.** A free audio/video chat app that is popular with young people and video-game enthusiasts.

**DM/PM.** Direct Message / Private Message; sending a private message directly to someone rather than commenting publicly.

**Doxing.** A form of cyber abuse; sharing someone's personal information (such as their real name, home address, or phone number) online. This can be extremely dangerous.



**Flamewar.** A particularly spiteful or angry online argument, sometimes started by a comment intentionally made to aggravate

people holding a certain political or religious viewpoint.

**FOMO.** “Fear of missing out.” The psychological tendency of people to want something or some experience that others talk about. Of course, this phenomenon is constantly exploited by advertisers.

**Hashtag.** You’ve probably seen what people born before the year 2000 or so



called “the pound symbol” (#) in front of a mashup of words online. This symbol, the hashtag, started as an easy way to categorize Twitter posts and for Twitter to find out what topics were trending. It has now become so ubiquitous that it is on nearly every social-media site, in ads, and now even in daily conversation.

**Image crafting.** Image crafting is when social-media users post an idealized portrayal of themselves or overshare things that make themselves look good.

**IMO / IMHO.** “In my opinion.” “In my humble opinion.”

**Incognito Mode/Private**

**Browsing.** A web browser or social media app mode that does not track where the user has been. This can be useful when letting someone use a browser on your personal computer so that they do not accidentally use your account and you do not accidentally use theirs, but it can also be used to attempt to hide inappropriate Internet searches from a parent or spouse. There are no perfect systems, but this can be mitigated with an Internet filter such as Net Nanny or an accountability program such as Covenant Eyes.



**Instagram/IG.** A popular social-media site that allows users to post images and short videos.

**Karen.** With apologies to anyone named Karen, “Karen” is the name chosen by Internet users to describe people who are obnoxious for being sticklers for rules or unreasonably considering themselves entitled to preferential treatment. Both men and women can be a Karen, in the Internet sense. People sometimes use “Chad” to compliment someone who is the opposite of a Karen.

**Meta.** Meta is the name of the company that owns Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, the Oculus VR platform, and several other social-media platforms.

**Meme.** An Internet joke, often using a familiar image template or a reference to a notoriously mocked movie. In many cases, one has to be familiar with the event or story referenced to understand the intended humor.

**Mod.** Moderator; the person responsible for maintaining an online discussion's rules. Usually there are many mods for a forum.

**Monetize/Demonetize.**

YouTube videos can be “monetized” or “demonetized,” meaning they can earn money for the video uploader via advertising—or not. Some YouTube videos are automatically demonetized for containing content YouTube does not like or for containing copyrighted content owned by someone other than the person who posted it.



**Newsjacking.** Advertisements that look like news articles. See also **clickbait**.

**NFT.** Non-Fungible Token. NFTs are a technology built off blockchain technology to prove that a user “owns” a digital image. However, NFTs have not been established in any legal courts to date to assert any ownership or exclusive rights to an image, and they do not technically prevent people from copying or sharing the image itself. People buy and sell NFTs because of perceived value and rarity—much as some people have done with Nike Sneakers or Beanie Babies.

**NSFW.** “Not safe for work.” Usually used as a warning that a post contains pornographic or violent content that should not be opened at work. Obviously, I would recommend steering clear of anything with an NSFW label.

**Phishing.** When an email or website tries to trick you into entering your personal information in order to steal that information.

Many of these pages look identical to the real login page. Always look at your browser bar to make sure you are on a legitimate site before logging in or entering any personal information.

**Pinterest.** A social-media site where users can “pin” posts to save them to “boards” (or categories). They can then share this board with others.

**Reddit.** An online forum where users can join different communities, called subreddits, where higher ranked content (determined by user votes) is shown first by default.

**Reverse-image search.** A service offered by search-engine providers such as Google to allow users to upload an image to find information about that image or to find images similar to the uploaded image. This is an extremely useful tool to verify posts on social media.

**SEO.** Search Engine Optimization. A marketing term; the set of techniques and tools that help improve a website’s ranking for target search terms.

**Shadow banning.** When a social-media account is flagged by a platform (such as Twitter) to not show up in searches or to be seen by as many people as other accounts. This appears to be a real practice that sites use.

**SJW.** Social Justice Warrior. A pejorative term for an Internet user who sees the promotion of far-left social issues as his or her calling in life.

**Sus.** Short for “suspicious.” This term is commonly used by the younger generation to mean anything that is suspicious, sketchy, or untrustworthy.

**Swatting.** When someone has been doxed (see definition above), particularly malicious people can use the information to call law enforcement and falsely make a bomb threat in hopes that a SWAT team raids the victim’s home.

**Trolling.** Posting something solely to annoy people you disagree with or to deceive people for facetious reasons.

**Twitich.** A live-streaming video site designed mostly around video games.

**Twitter.** A social-media site that limits the length of posts to encourage brief, scrollable content.

**Vaguebooking.** The practice of posting unclear yet sad posts to get people’s attention. (Example: Posting “Today was the WORST” without providing details.)

**VPN.** A program used to send your Internet traffic through another computer to anonymize your Internet use. Some reasons to use a VPN are to avoid government tracking/censorship or to access content that is (supposedly) available only in a certain geographic region.

**Cullen Johnson** works as a computer programmer and serves as a deacon in Grace Baptist Church of Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada.



**The following sites provide further definitions of frequently used online terms.**

[www.falcon.io/insights-hub/topics/social-media-management/social-media-terms-buzzwords-definitions-marketers-need-to-know/](http://www.falcon.io/insights-hub/topics/social-media-management/social-media-terms-buzzwords-definitions-marketers-need-to-know/)

[blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-definitions/](http://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-definitions/)

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# What Happened in Virginia?

Investigative journalists have alerted state legislators in key states about what happened during the 2020 elections. According to the Capital Research Center (CRC),

Private financing of government election offices under the guise of COVID-19 relief skewed voter turnout in the 2020 election and may have tipped the presidential election to Joe Biden. The chief culprit was Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who poured \$350 million into one sleepy nonprofit, the Center for Technology and Civic Life (CTCL). CTCL then distributed grants to hundreds of county and city elections officials in 47 states and the District of Columbia. Despite its claims that the grants were strictly for COVID-19 relief, not partisan advantage, the data show otherwise. CRC research into grants distributed in key states—Arizona and Nevada, Texas, Michigan and Wisconsin, Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Georgia—has documented their partisan effects.\*

Many have voiced the opinion that the elections were stolen. But it seems that much of the funding was technically legal, even if unethical. As of this writing, eighteen states have passed laws that now forbid the use of private funding for election offices.

This news about private, partisan funding should raise a question in our minds: *What happened in Virginia in 2021?* According to CRC, Virginia received \$3.7 million of the Zuckerberg funds. Yet conservatives won the most important statewide elections! Governor Glenn Youngkin, Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears, and Attorney General Jason Miyares were elected by slim margins. And this is what we might call “the rest

of the story.” These newly elected leaders point to a group of evangelists and pastors who helped to tip the balance to win those statewide elections. What follows is an interview with those faithful leaders: Evangelist Byron Foxx, Pastor Thomas Alvis, Pastor John Godfrey, and Dr. Mike Edwards (pastor emeritus and evangelist).

## *How did you get involved in this ministry to political leaders?*

**Byron Foxx:** The Lord stirred my heart many years ago through a meeting of the Capitol Connection (a ministry of AwakeAmerica.org). I became burdened with the spiritual needs of our political leaders—particularly in nearby Washington, DC. Also, I became aware of a survey that documented that there are 82 million professing evangelicals in the US, but only 40 million were registered to vote!

## *When did you begin to organize, and who was on your team?*

**Byron Foxx:** Beginning about ten months before the November elections, a group of Virginia pastors joined with me to begin an urgent series of meetings about our state. We held many seasons of prayer. The Lord brought together a team of men to help us reach churches around Virginia. Pastor Thomas Alvis has a gift for organization and acted as the secretary for the group. Dr. Michael Edwards is an experienced pastor who gave us great advice from his many years of political involvement. Pastor John Godfrey is a man of action who helped us put our plans into effect.

## *What was the result of your efforts?*

**Tom Alvis:** Ultimately, 312 Virginia churches were officially involved in these efforts. Together we registered more than seventy-seven thousand church

members—who were not registered to vote! Some pastors who had been largely indifferent to governmental elections came off of the sidelines to get in the harness with us. The election results showed that it was the church members across the state who really made the difference.

## *How did you approach pastors and churches who were hesitant to get involved?*

**Michael Edwards:** Though our efforts did yield a political impact, politics was never our priority. Our priorities were the gospel and a return to biblical values in our governance. At every rally the gospel was preached, and God blessed with professions of Christ made at every one of them. The emphasis at every pastors’ meeting was not which candidate to vote for but what values should we support and which candidates represent those values. Spiritual priority, not political priority, was key!

**John Godfrey:** We helped pastors understand that the Left has been intimidating

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## THOUGH OUR EFFORTS DID YIELD A POLITICAL IMPACT, POLITICS WAS NEVER OUR PRIORITY. OUR PRIORITIES WERE THE GOSPEL AND A RETURN TO BIBLICAL VALUES IN OUR GOVERNANCE. AT EVERY RALLY THE GOSPEL WAS PREACHED, AND GOD BLESSED WITH PROFESSIONS OF CHRIST MADE AT EVERY ONE OF THEM.

churches so that they have become ineffective. Liberals try to use the 1954 Johnson Amendment to make us think that we can't even discuss elections or candidates in our churches. That is not true, and liberal 501(c)(3) organizations use their influence to promote candidates all the time.

**Byron Foxx:** We held a number of "God & Country" rallies around the state. These were large rallies, and pastors were heavily involved. People came to Christ in many of these meetings, including three political candidates. We emphasized Christians' responsibilities to their God-ordained institutions: home, government and church. We also printed about a hundred thousand gospel tracts entitled "The Biggest Decision 2021." We emphasized that we are not desperate for a revival of conservatism; we are desperate for a revival of knowing Jesus Christ.

**Tom Alvis:** One of the most effective things we did was to meet with individual pastors,

one on one, to answer their questions and persuade them to get involved. We also had a number of small meetings with five-to-ten pastors at a time. We placed great emphasis on helping pastors and churches to be salt and light in their communities (Matt. 5:13–16; Phil. 2:14–16).

**John Godfrey:** Sometimes we chose neutral venues (such as civic auditoriums) for the rallies so that we could gather many gospel-preaching denominations together for large meetings.

### *How did you go about interacting with political candidates?*

**Byron Foxx:** We invited many of the statewide candidates to meet with a panel of pastors. Fourteen candidates agreed to meet with us before the 2021 elections. Most of these meetings were phone conferences or online meetings using videoconference software. We told these candidates that we would not record the interviews, but that we would take careful notes. We also told them that we would be sharing these notes with our constituent churches. We were looking for men and women we wouldn't have to lobby, because they would make choices based on godly values. We were seeking candidates who would defend religious freedom and the life of every child—born and unborn. This would include candidates for local school boards, electoral boards and city and county councils. Using the notes from these interviews—and voting records where available—we produced voter guides to distribute throughout the state. We found that even candidates who did not know the Lord would ask us, "Where are the preachers who will preach the Bible?" We found that the candidates were very grateful when the pastors would pray over them. For the 2022 elections, twenty-one candidates have already agreed to meet with us.

**John Godfrey:** Because of their efficiency, phone interviews provide a personal platform for exposure. Preachers are able to witness the candidates answer questions firsthand and report those responses to their congregations. The questions were not about petty subjects but about biblical issues that are nonnegotiable. This helped us get believers involved on the local level. This is the way to combat Critical Race Theory in schools and the transgender propaganda. We emphasized to our people that if you are not involved in the local party, then you don't have input on the candidates.

**Michael Edwards:** Noah Karvelis wrote that "the town hall meeting is a tradition that dates back to the very beginnings of American democracy. One of the very first town halls on record was held in 1633, when the citizens of Dorchester, Massachusetts, came together to discuss the issues that affected their community."

### *A recent news report discussing corruption in the Pennsylvania elections highlighted the difference that poll watchers made in Virginia. Were believers involved in this effort as well?*

**Tom Alvis:** Election integrity is a significant issue in all the states right now, especially after the 2020 elections. Virginia churches recruited one hundred people throughout the state as election officials; many of these were accepted by the state. Thirteen hundred of our people served as poll watchers. We told all them that our goal was to serve the people of Virginia by making it easy to vote but hard to cheat. Our people challenged many irregularities on the voter rolls, including one person who was registered seventeen times, and the address turned out to be a vacant lot!



Governor Glenn Youngkin with Evangelist Byron Foxx

Continued on page 27





# Power and Pitfalls in Using Technology in Ministry

**E**very aspect of our world has been impacted variously by technology. By the time you read this article, some of the technologies I am describing will be obsolete and replaced by new ones. Technology has profoundly impacted our ministry pursuits as well. Whether you are a deacon organizing care for church members, a teacher preparing to teach your primary class, a pastor preparing your sermon, or the “sound guy” making sure there are no audiovisual mishaps in the service, your ministry has been impacted by ever-changing technologies.

In thirty-five years of schooling and ministry I have observed incredible changes in technology and normative ministry tools. We have transitioned from flannel graph and chalk boards to LCD screens and home-generated visual presentations. By way of personal testimony, I entered Bible college with an electric typewriter and finished my graduate work with a Packard Bell 8088 desktop computer. That year I was introduced to Online Bible. Although it was free, it was stored on a series of twenty-two 5.25-inch floppy disks.

Communication has transitioned from pay phones, land lines, pagers, a bag phone, to computers and smart phones. Early in ministry, I memorized all the church family’s phone numbers. Today, why bother? The multiple ways they can be contacted are stored in my contact preferences.

Technology can enhance our service to both God and people. If we become skilled users of technology, our effectiveness can increase. Ecclesiastes 10:10 teaches, “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.” Proverbs 14:4 says, “Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.” The power of technology also brings with it, certain pitfalls that need to be identified and avoided. For this article, consider three contrasts that will help you evaluate whether your technology use is strengthening or diminishing your effectiveness in ministry.

## FORM VS. SUBSTANCE

One essential aspect of ministry is the communication of truth. This takes place

in our teaching, preaching, discipling, and even our worship. From a research study recorded in the *Journal of Education and Practice*, we read, “People generally remember 10% of what they READ, 20% of what they HEAR, 30% of what they SEE, 50% of what they HEAR and SEE, 70% of what they SAY and 90% of what they SAY as they DO a thing.”\* This should provide the motivation we need to use creative teaching methods to increase the effectiveness of our ministries. Technology has provided us many more options than were previously available.

Technology use to increase our effectiveness in ministry carries some inherent pitfalls. Content is still king! If we are replacing diligent study with creativity, we will be doing those in our care a disservice. The use of new methods and technologies will require time to master. My younger readers may not identify as much with this struggle. For those who did not grow up with an iPhone in their hands, the learning curve is more demanding. Do not let this discourage you from developing and learning. Do not let this keep you from diligent

content work either. Form and substance should not be mutually exclusive, but when you are pressed for time, choose substance over form.

A second pitfall is the belief that appearance is more valuable than substance. A fresh coat of paint on rotten wood may give the illusion of repair, but it is just an illusion. Your creative use of technology should illustrate and support your communication of the Scripture. That use should not become the end. When asked about an illustration that the preacher had used in his sermon, he replied, "It had nothing to do with the text. It was just a good story and I had to tell it." Do not let technology simply reflect a pursuit of what is culturally relevant without a clear connection to the work that you are doing.

A third pitfall is an unhealthy reliance on form. We must never be convinced that our success rests in our ingenuity, creativity, and skilled use of the most recent tools. Methods do not save. Tools do not sanctify. God's Spirit uses His Word to bring conviction and sanctify His people (Zech. 4:6; Eph. 6:18; John 17:17). Methods are not the issue. Everyone uses methods. It is the teacher's reliance on the methods as the source and reason for effectiveness that bankrupts the process.

## **MULTIPLIED EFFECTIVENESS VS. BUSYNESS**

The general purpose of technology is to make our work efficient and to multiply our effectiveness. Personal computers have allowed us to store all the work we have done on sermons. All the charts we have created, illustrations we have used, helpful resources we have engaged with can all be stored for easy retrieval. Texting, e-mail, and robo-calling technology have allowed us to communicate with everyone efficiently and quickly. Bible-study software put many of our normal study resources at our fingertips. We can carry a library on our laptops and mobile devices to study almost anywhere and at any time we desire. Churches can receive visual reports from their supported missionaries for minimal expense. Hymns may be added to our weekly worship that are not included in our hymnals.

There are a few pitfalls that need to be addressed here as well. The first pitfall is indiscriminately adding to our workloads. The same technology that has lightened

some aspects of our workload has introduced the ability to accomplish more tasks. Just because we *can* do something does not mean that we *should*. I wonder if some of the great works of former servants of God would be available for us today if they had to share their writing time with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Linked-In. What if Spurgeon, in addition to his regular duties, added the creation and maintenance of his church's web page, created his own advertising via desktop publishing, and was preparing weekly projection slides for worship and announcements? We also feel compelled to visit daily news sites and blogs. Any of these activities may fit well within our intended scope of ministry, but, remember, we are all allotted the same amount of time. We must pay for these activities from our time budget. There is only so much that we can do.

The second pitfall is the myth of multitasking. I am thankful for the technology that allows me to listen to sermons while driving and for Bluetooth devices that allow me to communicate from my car. There are a few things that we can do simultaneously. Most of us can walk and chew gum at the same time. Most things, however, require individual attention. As I was writing these words, I received notification that I have just received four more e-mails. If I go and check those e-mails, I am not multitasking. I am stopping my concerted effort to write and replacing it with an effort to stay connected. Often multitasking is distraction that is an illusion of efficiency. Planned breaks in your routine can increase your effectiveness, but random interruptions diminish your effectiveness.

Finally, consider how much time you are wasting. Technology has given us multiple forms of mind-numbing entertainment. We can play games, engage in fantasy sports leagues, comment on and debate with people we will never see, and watch videos of people slipping on icy sidewalks. Like our money budgets, we must analyze where all the little time exchanges go and how much they are ultimately costing us. All kinds of perversion are easily available through various forms of technology. This we must steadfastly resist.

## **MASTER VS. SERVANT**

Technology is a tool. As a tool it has provided enormous amounts of help in

accomplishing ministry objectives. Like all our tools, we need to take adequate care of our technology aides. Adequate care will include updates, continuing education, adaptation, and flexibility.

There is a line that we cross when technology shifts from servant to master. Ecclesiastes 5:11 says; "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" Technology is much like that. Here are some helpful questions to help you determine whether technology is serving you or you are serving technology.

**Can you unplug?** Are you able to have undistracted time with God? With your wife? With your children? Can you take a vacation? Enjoy dinner with your family? Ignore a text during the church service?

**Can you do without?** Is it possible for you to engage in regular ministry during an extended power outage?

**Is there balance?** Does your technology increase your workload? Do you need to be engaging this technology or is it a distraction?

**Does technology allow your class or congregation to be helped?** Sometimes our technological ineptness, our poor execution, and our poor equipment serves as a source of irritation instead of helping people to see and love God more.

**Does engaging with your tools replace engaging with people?** Do you realize that there are other valuable tools that you can use to help people grow that are not technological? Does a hurried text or e-mail replace a needed face-to-face conversation?

God has granted us to live in this age, with these tools to do His work. Like all of God's gifts, the good intended can be overcome by the pitfalls that accompany the blessings. But as Proverbs 22:3 states, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

**Robert Condict** serves as pastor of Heartland Baptist Church in Marysville, Ohio.



\* <https://files.eric.ed.gov/full-text/EJ1079541.pdf>



## Book Review:

# 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

by Tony Reinke

**N**o one can take an honest look at the world at large and say that the smartphone revolution has *not* affected humanity. We impulsively reach for our phone the moment we wake up in the morning (even if for no other reason than to turn off the alarm!). Often the first inclination for someone with “free time” is to read the latest news article or scroll through the seemingly endless posts on various social media outlets. The question one must ask is, *How has the advent of the smartphone affected humanity?* And, a second question: *Has it affected humanity for the better?* These questions lie at the heart of Tony Reinke’s book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. Reinke, a journalist and senior writer at DesiringGod.org, places his finger on the heartbeat of the smartphone’s effect on people. He skillfully identifies twelve ways (hence, the title) the smartphone has changed its users. The twelve ways are laid out in the twelve chapter titles for his book:

We Are Addicted to Distraction  
We Ignore Our Flesh and Blood  
We Crave Immediate Approval  
We Lose Our Literacy  
We Feed on the Produced  
We Become What We “Like”

We Get Lonely  
We Get Comfortable in Secret Vices  
We Lose Meaning  
We Fear Missing Out  
We Become Harsh to One Another  
We Lose Our Place in Time

Reinke notes in the conclusion that he organized the book into a chiasm with the two chapters in the middle (six and seven) serving as the centerpiece of the book. At the center of the chiasm Reinke argues that our misuse of smartphones can overtake and distort our identity (chapter 6) and tempt us toward unhealthy isolation and loneliness (chapter 7). To avoid these spiritual perils one must carefully observe the spiritual disciplines of treasuring Christ (chapter 6) and seeking to serve his or her neighbor (chapter 7). Put simply, chapters 6 and 7 “focus on the two greatest commandments that frame our identity and define our purpose on earth: love God (6) and love your neighbor (7)” (p. 190).

Reinke’s book serves both as a warning call and beacon of hope to all smartphone-addicted users. Several insights in the book pierce through the self-deception of our own hearts and draw us toward the brilliance of Christ.



## SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT WARNINGS

There are several significant warnings I came away with from this excellent read. First, the smartphone is a powerful tool that can swiftly consume the life and time of its user. Whether it be mindless games, empty social media posts, or endless work e-mails, our smartphones frequently dominate our time. I recently travelled by airplane. While waiting in the airport terminal I marveled at the amount of people who sat staring at the blue light emanating from the small computer in their hands. Very few in that airport terminal talked person-to-person. Thus, they spent their “extra time” between getting through security and boarding their plane by staring at their smartphones. Like many others we think we have “time to kill,” yet Scripture makes it clear that “[Christians] do not have ‘time to kill’—[they] have time to redeem” (p. 180; cf. Eph. 5:16). I am not convinced that Christians will stand before the Lord one day and say, “Lord, if only I had spent more time on social media entertaining myself!”

A second warning we would do well to observe is that our smartphone can easily become a device which harbors our secret sins. With the advent of the Internet and



smartphones we have access to some of the vilest filth the human heart can devise. In many ways smartphones reveal the veracity of the biblical refrain, “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Apart from the hope of the gospel, Satan has taken what can be an advantageous tool and used it to further “[blind] the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Third, we would do well to remember that our smartphones can become idols which demand exclusive worship. Many people are unable to go anywhere without their smartphone for both harmless and destructive reasons. When we drive to a destination, for example, we frequently open up the maps app so as not to lose our way. On the other hand, when we are at family gatherings it can be safer to stare at our screen (which effectively renders us invisible and isolated) than to talk to *that* family member. What can be a wonderful tool all too often becomes what we worship. Parents with teenagers who possess a smartphone realize that the greatest chastisement they can inflict upon their teenagers is to take away their smartphone. Take away the smartphone for *any* individual and you will quickly realize the powerful draw

it has on human affections. Satan’s singular goal throughout human history has not changed: prod humans made in the image of God to worship everything *other* than the One who alone deserves and demands worship (cf. Exod. 20:1–6; Isa. 42:8). Satan employed every tactic he could muster to deceive and coerce Christ to worship him, the serpent of old (Matt. 4:8–10). But our Lord boldly replied “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). Jesus’ example serves as a model for twenty-first-century smartphone users whose device has become a god which demands the worship which exclusively belongs to the Lord.

### THREE QUESTIONS

While Reinke offers a sober warning to the dangers of the smartphone, he also highlights three questions that can guide you toward proper smartphone usage (p. 194).

Ends: Do my smartphone behaviors move me toward God or away from Him?

Influence: Do my smartphone behaviors edify me and others, or do they build nothing of lasting value?

Servitude: Do my smartphone behaviors expose my freedom in Christ or my bondage to technique?

In asking these questions a smartphone user looks beyond the *temporal* and to the *eternal*. In what way can the use of any technology promote godliness, aid in the furtherance of the gospel (Matt. 28:19–20), and ultimately glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31)?

*12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* is well worth the read. It is saturated with the truths of Scripture. It will cause you to evaluate how your current smartphone usage may or may not be magnifying the sweetness of our God. You will come face to face with the question of how you may or may not be redeeming the time you have in this life, a life which Scripture describes as a mere vapor (James 4:14). Reinke’s goal is not to press every smartphone user into eliminating smartphone usage altogether, but neither is his goal to let the mesmerizing blue pixels hold people captive to their allure. He offers plenty of helpful applications throughout the book, some of which I have implemented in my own smartphone usage.

If you wish to find a book about technology that is carefully researched, scripturally saturated, and personally practical, then get a copy of Reinke’s book.

**Rodney King** serves as the youth pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio.



# FROM *the* CALL TO *the* FIELD



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# What about “Virtual Communion”?



In response to a question from one of the folks in our church, I asked several friends in the ministry for their take on this issue. The question was along these lines: “I noticed that X Church across town holds a ‘virtual communion’ with their services. Should we do something like that?” My instinct throughout the crisis was that something was “off” about “virtual communion,” so we did not practice it.

Now that the crisis has wound down, it may be that some still wonder about creating some form of this for shut-ins and those who can’t attend a regular service for some reason. How should we respond?

Those who replied to my query were, to a man, against the notion. I’m going to condense the reasoning into three categories.

## EXEGETICALLY

First Corinthians 11, the quintessential communion passage, uses “come together” five times. The Scripture is quite clear that the service involves real assembly—it is a corporate service and not one that we can practice “on our own” at home as a devotional exercise.

Besides this, earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul points out the real unity in the body that communion expresses. We are one body; we partake of one cup and one bread. (See 1 Cor. 10:16–17.) It is a corporate exercise around one table. It is hard to see how this unity can be reflected in an online service—the only unity is a unity of action at a simultaneous time—not just one loaf, not just one cup.

## THEOLOGICALLY

The Supper celebrates the Lord’s absence. The words “ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26) speak of the Lord’s absence. Jesus promised in the institution of the Supper that “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.” He promised to come. When we gather together to celebrate the Supper, it communicates our unity in His work of the past, but it also quite clearly communicates our united participation in the Blessed Hope that He will come again and that we will sup with Him in that day.

“Even so, the gathering of believers together physically is part of creating that longing for the future Marriage Supper of the Lamb when He will be present.”<sup>1</sup> That’s it!

Truly, believers who can’t attend still yearn for the meal, but we shouldn’t short-circuit the Blessed Hope with a “virtual gathering.” We won’t sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb watching the proceedings on video screens. The logistics will be immense, but the gathering, we believe, will be real. We will be *there*.

## ECCLESIASTICALLY

“If we are careful to fence the table, the Internet makes it far too easy to abuse.”<sup>2</sup> There is some difference among us on whether communion should be open, closed, or close. I won’t get into that debate here, because I think that whatever view

you hold under those three headers, you can agree with this statement: An online streaming “communion service” provides no way to limit the participants so that those who should not partake are excluded in any way.

I describe my view as “open communion,” based on Paul’s instructions to “let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). Nevertheless, when we hold the service, I provide the criteria on how you should examine yourself, guidance for parents with young children, and so on. Others who are more restrictive will allow only members (some would also include “regular attenders”) to participate. In any case, we take the admonitions of Scripture very seriously here.

How is it possible to provide proper limitations when a communion service is streamed online?

## CONCLUSION

The impulse to provide an online communion service for those who can’t

attend comes from a heart of compassion. I sympathize with those who want to be a blessing to others who are prevented from attending the service for some reason. However, though we sympathize, shouldn’t we make the occasion an opportunity to further discipleship? The Lord commanded the service, that is true, but it is something we do together. One pastor said this:

My response to the request [for “online communion”] was that this yearning is something I share and am glad to see. However, there is some value in preserving the observance of it to an in-person service. Similarly, I do not pour or sprinkle someone who wants to be baptized if they are not able to be immersed. The symbolism is important. And while it could be maintained that we take the elements together, part of the symbolism, I believe, includes the distribution of the elements, the oversight of the deacons/elders, the prayer, and the reading of Scripture. There is an immediacy [to] it.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, a point of clarification as we close out this discussion. What I offer here is a reasoned application of the Bible. Each pastor, each church, should come to its own conclusions based on what the Bible says. Each of us is accountable to God. The thoughts expressed here hopefully provide a biblically faithful application of Scripture.

*This article is a condensation of a much longer article found on Proclaim & Defend, published January 20, 2021 (proclaimand-defend.org/2021/01/20/covid-19-virtual-meetings-and-communion/).*

Don Johnson is the pastor of Grace Baptist Church of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.



<sup>1</sup> Joel Arnold, e-mail exchange with the author.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Private e-mail conversation with the author.

## GFA Welcomes its New Executive Director



**Jon Crocker, missionary  
to Mexico, was appointed  
by the Board in May 2022.**

*“Jon possesses infectious compassion for the lost and preaches with an authority that stirs hearts. He is GFA: deeply committed to its fundamentalist heritage, its philosophy of missions, its missionaries, and its faithful, loyal supporters.”*

**Dr. Mark Minnick – Pastor and  
Vice President of the GFA Board**

The Crockers plan to transition to  
Greenville, SC, by the end of 2022.

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ISSN 1526-8284

## Mailbag

I am doing a lecture for our Contemporary Theology class at Baptist College of Ministry on the topic of social justice or intersectionality. I am curious if you have ever written on the topic, or do you have any recommended resources for that topic?

*Pastor Micah Shoultz  
Falls Baptist Church  
Menomonee Falls, WI*

**Editor:** Our March/April issue of *FrontLine* magazine dealt with the topic.

I joined the FBFI last month and just received my first copy of *FrontLine* magazine and was very impressed by how it tackled issues (like CRT [critical race theory]) head-on. I also take *World* magazine . . . and have been disappointed that it is not covering current issues that I think any Christian magazine should (such as CRT, LGBTQRSUVWZYX . . . , "What is a woman?," etc.). I wrote its editor about this and was directed to subpublications (online) that they claimed to cover these issues. Romans 1 is still true, and it is directly involved in being "salt and light." Because I'm not an Evangelical or KJV Only(ite), I struggle with what to call myself anymore. Inerrant Biblicalist?

The biggest issue I see is getting "our children" out of public

education. My parents thought this was necessary the first chance they got into an area that had Christian schools. That was about forty years ago. Now, it is absolutely required.

Thanks for not being afraid,

*Robert Higgins  
Garland, TX*

## Proverbs and Social Media

Continued from page 6

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

<sup>3</sup> Global Social Media Stats, Kepios analysis, accessed at [<sup>4</sup> Alex Mitchell, "'The Ultimate Waste': Young people say no to TikTok, social media," \*New York Post\*, April 18, 2022, accessed at <https://nypost.com/2022/04/18/the-ultimate-waste-gen-z-says-no-to-tiktok-social-media/>.](https://datareportal.com/social-media-users#:~:text=Kepios%20analysis%20shows%20that%20there,of%20the%20total%20global%20popula-tion, April 19, 2022.</a></p>
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<sup>5</sup> "Former Facebook exec: Social media is ripping apart society" 12.11.17, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40506058/former-face->

[book-exec-social-media-is-ripping-apart-society.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ratner, "Why The Era of Social Media Is Due to Come to an End," *Big Think*, January 3, 2018, <http://bigthink.com/paul-ratner/why-the-era-of-social-media-is-due-to-come-to-an-end>.

<sup>7</sup> "S-Tweet Revenge: more than half of us are planning to get our own back on social networks," <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech-and-gadgets/s-tweet-revenge-more-than-half-of-us-are-planning-to-get-our-own-back-on-social-networks-7769900.html>, accessed 03/20/17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Antoci, Angelo, et. al, *Civility vs. Incivility in Online Social Interactions: An Evolutionary Approach*, published November 1, 2016, Middlesex University, United Kingdom (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0164286> <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0164286>).

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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 Potpourri Of Observations On The Ministry

### SACRED ROUTINES

*In four quarters were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south. And their brethren, which were in their villages, were to come after seven days from time to time with them. For these Levites, the four chief porters, were in their set office, and were over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them.*

*And certain of them had the charge of the ministering vessels, that they should bring them in and out by tale [i.e., by number]. Some of them also were appointed to oversee the vessels, and all the instruments of the sanctuary, and the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests made the ointment of the spices.*

*And Mattithiah, one of the Levites, who was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the set office over the things that were made in the pans. And other of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, to prepare it every sabbath (1 Chron. 9:24–32).*

Here are routines of sacred service requiring almost no mental engagement nor affording any latitude for personal innovations. *After seven days . . . opening thereof every morning . . . bring them in and out by tale . . . [making] the ointment . . . [preparing the shewbread] every sabbath*; the unvarying times and tasks must have tempted the Levites to feelings of monotony and spiritual boredom.

But is anything about the place, times, and conduct of scriptural worship insignificant? If not, then all complaints about uninteresting ruts and tedium must be silenced decisively. Divine worship is the one sphere of life in which the spice of variety is unallowed.

Daily and weekly rhythms are what preserve the character of a church's worship as both scriptural and sacred. And over time these hallowed routines alter and prosper the worshippers themselves from the inside out. In the appointed practices the blessed Holy Spirit keeps separate the sheep from the goats, secures hearts for God alone, keeps consciences clear and clean, and sanctifies to pleasing acceptability what forgiven sinners offer up to God. To these ends, some in the churches, as in the temple's precincts, are appointed to be *chief porters* [or *gatekeepers*]. Let them consider earnestly that they are in an office of trust and that *the charge [has been] upon them*.

### DIVINE REVERSALS

*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. . . . He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:46–48, 52–53).*

Mary's Magnificat exalts the Lord for His odds-defying reversals. She of *low estate* will be called *blessed*. The *mighty* are unseated, while the lowly are *exalted*. The *hungry* are made full, but the *rich* are dismissed penniless. For these unforeseen turn overs and turn arounds Mary magnifies the Lord.

But the opportunity for God to be praised for such startling reversals, requires that there be, first, those who

### INSIDE

Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor's study. . . . .	5
Straight Cuts—An exegetical study . . . . .	6
Windows—Themed sermon illustrations . . . . .	7

were (or are) as Mary was. She was *the handmaid of the Lord* (38), who [feared] *him* (50). But she was also of *low estate* in both circumstances (48) and station (52); one of the *hungry* (53).

Perhaps the phenomenon of “divine reversal” is a key unlocking the mystery of the impoverished state of so many of the Lord’s servants. Or of their incurable illnesses, heartrending losses, and bafflingly unfruitful ministries? Does God actually promote the wicked and suppress His own? Does many a minister and missionary *labor unrewarded* for the sake of a coming, surprising, shining moment?

*When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad* (Ps. 126:1–3).

## TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled [afflicted] on every side, yet not distressed* (2 Cor. 4:7–8a).

Human weakness is not a hindrance, but an ideal opportunity for the triumph of divine power. To the degree that a minister asserts his own adequacy, to that degree does he withdraw himself from the aid of the grace of God.

Maurice Roberts observed,

Fancy a man like Whitefield, that God should afflict him with asthma! What a strange providence, one would say. He was called to preach so many times a week in Britain and America and God gave him asthma! Or consider Robert Murray M’Cheyne, that seraphic young man, how God sent on him tuberculosis so that he would cough and he would have to lie down and rest. . . . His soul was like a dynamo burning with zeal for the glory of God and yet the treasure was in an earthen vessel. . . . Jonathan Edwards reminds us that a great man may suffer humbling in his own congregation where he has served eminently. Is it not astonishing that a man who saw those revivals, a man the like of whom hardly ever walked on the face of the earth, should yet be voted out by his own people? And then there is that detail of when he was trying to write his books. He did not even have enough paper and so he had to stitch pieces together and even to use small scraps! . . . We may have the paper but not the genius! He had the genius but he did not have the paper. Is it not strange? The treasure was in

an earthen vessel (*Banner of Truth*, Issue 287–88 [August/September 1987], 27).

C. H. Spurgeon spoke to the ministerial students in his pastors’ college,

Look at *the preacher who has no burdens*. His sermon is in his pocket; there cannot happen any mischief to it unless a thief should steal it; he has rehearsed all his action, he is as safe as an automaton. He does not need to pray for the Spirit of God to help him in his preaching; and though he uses the form, one wonders what the prayer can mean. He surveys the congregation with the complacency of a gardener looking at a bed of flowers. He has something to say, and he knows what it is going to be, every word of it, and therefore he says it with ease, and comes down the stairs as pleased with himself as heart could desire; the notion of trembling is far from him, he is not so weak.

Yonder is a poor brother, who has been tugging away with his brains, wrestling on his knees, and bleeding at his heart; he is half-afraid that he may break down in the sermon, and he is fearful that he will not reach the hearts of the people; but he means to try what can be done by the help of God. Be sure that he will get at the people, and God will give him converts. He is looking up to God, for he feels feeble in himself.

You know which of the two preachers you would sooner hear, and you know who is the really strong man of the two; the weak man is strong, and the strong man is weak (Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 208–9).

## PRAYING BEFORE AND WHILE PRAYING

Andrew Fuller, first secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society that sent William Carey out to India in 1793, testified as he lay dying, *I wish I had prayed more for the assistance of the Holy Spirit in studying and preaching my sermons* (quoted by John Webster Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* [1830], 290).

It has been said by one of the most profound and devout minds in English literature, that “an hour of solitude passed in sincere and earnest prayer, or the conflict with and conquest over a single passion or subtle bosom sin, will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty and form the habit of reflection, than a year’s study in the schools without them.” If prayer and Christian self-discipline do this for the habits of thought, most certainly will they do the same for habits of feeling.



If an hour of serious self-examination and self-mortification or an hour of devout meditation and earnest prayer, does not set the affections of the preacher into a glow, probably nothing in the way of means can. The greatest preachers have, consequently, been in the habit of preparing for composition by a season of prayer and meditation. The maxim of Luther, "To pray well is to study well," is familiar to all. Augustine says, "Let our Christian orator, who would be understood and heard with pleasure, pray before he speak. Let him lift up his thirsty soul to God before he pronounces anything.

By filling his mind with his theme, and awakening his religious affections by prayer and devout meditation, the sacred orator will bring his whole inner being into that awakened and exalted condition which prepares for direct and rapid composition. He will become a *roused* man and will find his faculties of cognition and feeling in free and living action (W.G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* [1867], 115–16).

Thomas Murphy cautioned,

They [preachers] are likely to err and make grievous mistakes; how can they be safe without the guidance of the Holy Spirit? All that they do and say may be so momentous in its results that they should not rely upon their own understanding, but hold constant fellowship with God. . . . Constant praying will make the whole work of the minister safe and happy. He will then be preparing for the pulpit and other duties every day and hour. Quaintly has it been said, "They who have been made *fishers* of men mind their business both when they are fishing and when they are mending their nets." In everything should the minister wrestle in prayer, because God is so willing to hear and to help him, because it is so safe to rely always on the infinite understanding and infinite power (*Pastoral Theology* [1877], 70–71).

## THE GOOD WINE LAST

*When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now* (John 2:9–10).

Why should a minister's first years be the *good wine*, and his last years the *worse*? Should it not be the reverse? What are all ministers but *earthen vessels* (2 Cor. 4:7)? What is the treasure they contain but *the light of the*

*knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (4:6)? Should not an old minister's understanding of this glory far surpass, both theologically and above all, *experientially*, his youthful knowledge? And should not what the Lord Jesus does with this latter "wine" *manifest His glory* the most remarkably (John 2:11)?

## WHAT WILT THOU?

*And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight* (Mark 10:51).

The blind man had been praying out loud, and that a great deal, *Thou Son of David, have mercy on me*. The cry had reached the ear of the Lord. He knew what he wanted, and was ready to grant it to him. But ere He does it, He asks him: "*What wilt thou* that I should do unto thee?" He wants to hear from his own lips, not only the general petition for mercy, but the distinct expression of what his desire was. Until he speaks out, he is not healed.

There is now still many a suppliant to whom the Lord puts the same question, and who cannot until it has been answered, get the aid he asks. Our prayers must not be a vague appeal to His mercy, an indefinite cry for blessing, but the distinct expression of a definite need. Not that His loving heart does not understand our cry, or is not ready to hear. But He desires it for our own sakes. Such definite prayer teaches us to know our own needs better. It demands time, and thought, and self-scrutiny to find out what really is our greatest need. It searches us and puts us to the test as to whether our desires are honest and real, such as we are ready to persevere in. It leads us to judge whether our desires are according to God's Word, and whether we really believe that we shall receive the things we ask. It helps us to wait for the special answer, and to mark it when it comes.

And yet how much of our prayer is vague and pointless. Some cry for mercy, but take not the trouble to know what mercy must do for them. Others ask, perhaps to be delivered from sin, but do not begin by bringing any sin by name from which the deliverance may be claimed. Still others pray for God's blessing on those around them, for the outpouring of God's Spirit on their land or the world, and yet have no special field where they wait and expect to see the answer. To all the Lord says: "And what is it now you really want and expect Me to do?" (Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Tenth Lesson).

## GREAT THINGS FOR THYSELF

*The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah. . . . Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; . . . Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not (Jer. 45:1a, 2, 5a).*

Edward Payson (1783–1827), father of Elizabeth Payson Prentiss (“More Love to Thee, O Christ”), wrote a letter of counsel to a candidate for the ministry.

I will tell you one thing, which experience has taught me. If you will believe it, on my word, it will save you suffering. If not, you must learn it, as I did, under the scourge.

I took up a little work, purporting to be the lives of sundry characters, as related by themselves. Two of these characters agreed in remarking, that they were never happy until they ceased striving to be great men. This remark struck me, as you know the most simple remarks will strike us, when Heaven pleases.

It occurred to me at once, that most of my sins and sufferings were occasioned by an unwillingness to be the nothing which I am, and by consequent struggles to be something. I saw that if I would but cease struggling, and consent to be anything, or nothing, just as God pleases, I might be happy.

You will think it strange, that I mention this as a new discovery. In one sense, it was not new; I had known it for years. But I now saw it in a new light. My heart saw it, and consented to it; and I am comparatively happy.

My dear brother. If you can give up all desire to be great, and feel heartily willing to be nothing, you will be happy too. You must not even wish to be a great Christian; that is, you must not wish to make great attainments in religion, for the sake of knowing that you have made them. Very true, very good, you will say, though somewhat trite; but how am I to bring myself to such a state?

Let me ask, in reply, Why are you not troubled, when you see one man receive military, and another [some other kind of] honors? Why are you not unhappy because you cannot be a colonel, a general . . . ? Because, you answer, I have no desire for those titles or distinctions.

And why do you not desire them? Simply because you are not running a race in competition with those who obtain them. You stand aside, and say, “Let those who wish for these things have them.”

Now if you can, in a similar manner, give up all competition with respect to other objects; if you can stand aside from the race which too many

other ministers are running, and say, from your heart, Let those who choose to engage in such a race divide the prize; let one minister run away with the money, and another with the esteem, and a third with the applause, etc.; I have something else to do a different race to run; be God’s approbation the only prize for which I run, let me obtain that, and it is enough. I say, if you can, from the heart, adopt this language, you will find most of your difficulties and sufferings vanish (from *The Complete Works of Edward Payson*, I, 320–21).

## BREAD

*Better is a little with righteousness. . . (Prov. 16:8).*

*Balaam, the son of Bosor, . . . loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Pet. 2:15).*

Bread has been an old temptation to ministers. . . . But such as were faithful to the Lord have always hazarded the bread, rather than a good conscience. . . . Nature is content with little, grace with less; if we cannot trust Christ for our bread, I think we will scarcely be able to trust him with our souls. Miserable is that bread which cannot be got down without straining our conscience; but little bread will go far with a good conscience and God’s blessing. . . . *And their countenance did appear fairer and fairer in flesh, than the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat* (Thomas Boston, “Christ’s Presence with Gospel Ministers,” *Works*, IX, 165–66).

Where is thy faith? Is not God’s providence the best inheritance? Did not God work a miracle for Elijah? . . . Is not God all in all, and able to make a little go as far as much? . . . Doth he not ordinarily dispose things, that they that have little have no want, and they that have much have nothing to spare?

Ah, my unbelieving heart, take heed how thou dost distrust God. Take some of the arguments whereby thou would’st silence the unbelief of thy people, and bring them home to thyself. . . . If thou hast food and raiment for thyself and thine, be content, and say with Jacob, *It is enough*.

If my want may advantage the common cause of Christianity, I care not if I beg my bread from door to door, that I may effectually bring more souls to Jesus Christ. . . . If I conscientiously take care of my duty, God will take care of my comfort (Oliver Heywood, *Works*, I, 72–73).

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## *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*

If I could go back in time and visit a preacher of the past, I think I might choose to go to Dundee, Scotland, and hear Robert Murray M'Cheyne earnestly preaching to his large congregation. M'Cheyne's life was like the appearance of a meteor—brief and bright. He ministered as a pastor at St. Peter's Church for less than seven years before his tragic death at age twenty-nine in 1843. However, the continuing impact of his ministry far exceeds its length. Preachers still read his books, and tourists still visit his grave. In the last twenty years there has been a revival of interest in M'Cheyne's life and ministry. Five new biographies have appeared, and several volumes of previously unknown sermons have been published. What can account for M'Cheyne's continued popularity? One answer is that his life and ministry were beautifully captured in a classic biography titled *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*.

First published in 1844, this volume was the loving labor of M'Cheyne's best friend, Andrew Bonar. They first met at the University of Edinburgh, where they studied under Thomas Chalmers. In fact, they both were candidates for the same position of pastor at St. Peter's Church. In 1839 Bonar and M'Cheyne went on a lengthy and historic mission trip to Palestine. Bonar knew M'Cheyne well and wanted to preserve a sense of his unusual godliness for others. The 2004 Banner of Truth edition of *Memoir and Remains* is 648 pages. As the title implies, this book includes much more than just a biography. The *Memoir and Remains* includes letters, sermons, hymns, and excerpts from M'Cheyne's writings that had been published before his death.

Why should you invest the time in reading the life and words of this nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian? First, *Memoir and Remains* is truly a pastoral classic. Spurgeon said, “This is one of the best and most profitable volumes ever published. . . . The memoir of such a man ought surely to be in the hands of every Christian and certainly every preacher of the gospel” (from the dust jacket). Second, this book is a convicting catalyst, especially to pastors. When I first read this book years ago, my heart was greatly challenged by M'Cheyne's example of ministry and godliness. Although I have read many biographies since that time, I have never read one that touched my heart so deeply. I find in it several vital lessons for those in ministry that arise from this man's brief ministry.

First, pastors must make preaching a priority in their ministries. Listen to M'Cheyne's counsel: “The grand work of the minister, in which he is to lay out his strength of body and mind, is preaching. Weak and foolish as it may appear, this is the grand instrument which God has put into our hands, by which sinners are to be saved, and saints fitted for glory” (400–401). He continues in the same ordination sermon with these words: “O

brethren, this is our great work. It is well to visit the sick, and well to attend Presbyteries. It is well to write books or read them; but here is the main thing—Preach the Word” (401).

*This book is a convicting catalyst, especially to pastors. When I first read this book years ago, my heart was greatly challenged by M'Cheyne's example of ministry and godliness. Although I have read many biographies since that time, I have never read one that touched my heart so deeply. I find in it several vital lessons for those in ministry that arise from this man's brief ministry.*

The second lesson that we can learn from M'Cheyne's brief ministry is the necessity of prayer. Consider this convicting exhortation.

I ought to pray before seeing anyone. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, and then have family prayer, and breakfast, and forenoon callers, often it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. . . . I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then when secret prayer comes, the soul is often out of tune. I feel it is far better to begin with God—to see his face first—to get my soul near him before it is near another (157–58).

The third lesson that most obviously flows from his life is the necessity of a minister's godliness. Everyone who knew M'Cheyne noted that he was a godly man. My favorite quote from him is found in a letter to a young man named Dan Edwards, who was about to be ordained.

Do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument—I trust, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God (282).

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## The Root of Bitterness Is Not Bitterness

**W**e often focus on the complex words in a passage while ignoring the basic ones. Sometimes meaning turns on the simplest of words. Take, for example, the words of Hebrews 12:15b: “Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” What is the root of bitterness? That depends on how we understand the word “of.”

Many think that the “root of bitterness” is, well, bitterness. The word “of” here basically functions as an equal sign, “root = bitterness.” People typically understand this passage as a warning against having a bitter spirit because bitterness will poison you and those around you. Part of what makes this interpretation appealing is that it lines up with what we observe. Bitterness is often a root sin that spreads, affecting those around us. But is that what the author of Hebrews is talking about here? Another possible interpretation for the “root of bitterness” makes more sense given the Old Testament background and the Book of Hebrews as a whole.

The word “of” in the phrase “root of bitterness” could also mean, both in the English and the original Greek, “bitter root.” Here the word “of” makes the second word (bitterness) a description of the first (root). For example, the phrase “cake of sweetness” would mean “the sweet cake,” and “car of much speed” would mean “the fast car.” Although somewhat clunky in English, it’s at least possible that the word “bitterness” is not what the root symbolizes, but rather “bitterness” is a description of the root. This passage would then be a warning to make sure no “bitter root” springs up and defiles many.

Both interpretations are possible based on the word “of” alone. So which way should we go? The typical understanding of the passage where “root = bitterness” makes sense because we know immediately what sin the author has in mind. If the “root of bitterness” is not bitterness but “the bitter root,” then what sin is the author warning believers against? The answer comes from Deuteronomy 29:18, where Moses uses almost the exact same words as we find here in Hebrews. There Moses warns the Israelites, “Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood [bitterness].” While in English the connection between these two passages may be hard to see, the phrase in Hebrews is an almost word-for-word citation of Deuteronomy 29 in the Greek Old Testament. Although the Deuteronomy passage is longer and the order of the words is slightly different, it’s

clear that the author of Hebrews is borrowing from this Old Testament passage to make his point, and in Deuteronomy it’s very clear that the phrase means “bitter root.”

If this is true, then the author of Hebrews is warning his listeners against turning away from God. The “bitter root” here would be apostasy, and the caution would be that those who apostatize become like poisonous roots who corrupt and affect those around them. This understanding of the phrase fits well with the message of Hebrews. The author warns his audience against “an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (3:12), the danger of “fall[ing] away” (6:6), and “draw[ing] back unto perdition” (10:39). The sin that the author is so concerned about is a falling away from faith in Christ to move slowly back to Judaism. The author also pulls frequently from Old Testament imagery for this very sin, especially the wilderness generation of Israel (Heb. 3–4). Just as Israel went after idols in the wilderness and were destroyed for it (Num. 25), and just as they chose not to believe God and ended up wandering in the desert (Num. 14), so believers today need to beware that unbelief is contagious, spreading like a poison and destroying many.

The author of Hebrews is worried that his audience will fall away from their faith. For their ancestors, that meant chasing idols and refusing to enter the promised land. For them it would mean giving up on Christ and going back to Judaism. For us it means slowly slipping away from regular church attendance, faithful service, and a commitment to follow Christ daily. This apostasy, in all its various forms, is a hideous poison that not only ruins us, but drags others away from God with us. So, if the sin is apostasy, what is the solution? “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” This passage is a warning to consider the sober reality that we too could fall short of God’s grace. We must be serious about our faith, and we must be a part of a community that is willing to watch out for us and confront us if need be (Heb. 3:12–13). It’s tempting to think, “I’ll never quit on God!” but Moses warned the Israelites that they needed to watch out because that was a real possibility. And the author of Hebrews was concerned that his audience would take heed to the same warning. Christians today should likewise pay attention to these warnings and take heed, lest we too fail the grace of God.

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## Illustrations from Romans for Witnessing

**O**ur conservative Bible-believing churches are decreasing numerically. This numerical decrease points to the lack of effective soul-winning and discipleship-making. Effective Bible teaching, preaching, and witnessing include reading the verse or passage, defining unclear words, illustrating the theme, applying truth and inviting a response. In *Illustrations in Preaching* Charles Spurgeon summarized Thomas Fuller’s observation that illustrations are like windows in a house. They allow light in so you can see clearly the objects in a room. Jesus was the master of using parables or illustrations that were common, contemporary, and culturally significant to make clear or to illumine spiritual realities for His target audience. Illustrations are for illumination. The following illustrations of verses in Romans are to help give you clarity in witnessing.

### ROMANS 3:23

When I pastored a church close to Clemson, South Carolina, in the 1970s, I used an illustration to show an unsaved man that all of us human beings as sinners have missed the mark of God’s sinless perfection. I asked the man to imagine we had driven to the Clemson University football stadium and placed a large bull’s eye target in the middle of the football field. Then, after driving back to his backyard, I hand him a forty-pound pull bow and some arrows. I tell him, “Shoot the target we set up at the football stadium.” He says, “No way, it’s too far. We are three miles away, and if I try, the arrow will fall way short of that target.” I reminded him that in Romans 3:23 God tells us that all human beings commit sin and are falling short of His sinless perfection (the glory of God). No matter how hard we try or are told to reach God’s standard of holiness by not sinning, we cannot. I then asked him to accept that all humans are sinners and that included him and me. About twenty-five years after I shared that illustration with the man, he called me at my office. He said, “Are you Tony Miller that came to my house in Central, South Carolina, during the 1970s and had a Bible study with me?” I gave an affirmative. He said, “I want you to know that I never forgot an illustration you shared with me about trying to shoot an arrow from my backyard at a target on the Clemson football field. Years later, my Christian wife got me to go to her church, and what you shared and what I heard taught at that church brought me to Christ. I am calling you to let you know I am now saved.” The Holy Spirit had repeatedly used that illustration to remind the man that he, as a sinner, was regularly falling short of God’s sinless perfection.

In chapters four and five of the booklet *Done*, Carey Schmidt gives an excellent illustration for those who do not think they are so sinful because they are comparing themselves to those who appear to be worse sinners. Carey’s example is that if a person is told to jump up and touch a ten-foot-high basketball rim and does it, that would be good. If another person is told to jump up and touch an eleven-foot-high mark on the basketball backboard and does it, that would be great. These two people would be superior to most of us. But to tell both of them and all of us to jump up and touch the moon would be impossible apart from a miracle from God. Carey then points out that the standard that God requires of all of us human beings is to live sinlessly for a whole lifetime. As sinners by nature, we cannot. Therefore, God provided a substitute for us, Jesus Christ. He lived sinlessly as our representative and died sufficiently for our sins so God can be “just and the justifier” of those who believe on Jesus as their substitute (Rom. 3:19–26).

### ROMANS 6:23

Romans 6:23 contrasts a wage and a gift. The illuminated understanding by definition and illustration that sinners need is that a wage and a gift are polar opposites, mutually exclusive. (This illustration is tailored for an unsaved woman but can be adapted by using a different gift according to the age, gender, and culture of the person to whom the witness is being given.)

Suppose the cold season of the year is coming, and my wife’s winter coat is worn out. My wife is a stay-at-home mother, and I work a job and pay for all the family’s expenses. One day we are walking by the display window of a clothing store, and she asks me, “Don’t you think that winter coat there is adorable?” I tell her, “Yes,” pretending I don’t recognize that she needs and wants that coat. The next week the family celebrates her birthday and I present her with the winter coat she had so admired. She is all smiles as she checks to find out if it is her size. She runs down the hall to the full-length mirror, puts it on, and even twirls around in it. She runs back to hug me and thank me for the gift of love. But I stop her at arm’s length and inform her that in order for her to continue to keep the gift she will have to agree to polish my dress shoes for work once a week, wash my car every other week, paint the outside of the house this summer, trim our bushes every spring, and dig up a backyard area and grow my favorite vegetables every summer. What do you think her response would be about the “gift”? She would hand it back and say, “This is no gift because I am having to earn it, and it is not worth all the work I am going to do to have it and to keep it.”

## ROMANS 5:8

One of the young ladies in our church outside of Central, South Carolina, was a young Christian and very burdened for her unsaved father. He had recently divorced her mother and married another woman. I found him alone on a Sunday afternoon working on the new home he was building for his new wife. After I shared with him God's plan of salvation, he received Christ as a fifty-year-old man. He said he had never heard this message before, and he went on to live for God with the limitations of divorce and remarriage. His daughter was thrilled and then requested a salvation witness to her natural mother. In that same week, I made a visit to her mother. She was a very bitter woman because her husband had left her. As we turned to Romans 5:8, I asked her if she knew how much God loved her. She felt only anger and didn't seem interested in God's love. To illustrate God's great love, I asked her if she would be willing to take one of her five grown children and crucify that child in her backyard if she knew the death would forgive all of the sins of her neighbors. She quickly said she would not because she didn't love her neighbors that much. That, of course, would be extreme love. I then asked her, "Now do you see how much God loved you and all of us sinners? He showed us how much He loved us by taking the only Son He had and whom He had loved forever. That Son had pleased Him always. God put Him on a cross so you wouldn't have to suffer." She didn't receive Christ that day, but seeing the surpassing love God the Father and Son had for her tendered her heart. Some months later she gave her heart to the God who had loved her so much.

## ROMANS 10:13

Close friends of my wife's family lost an only son by drowning in a western Colorado lake. That lake did not have a lifeguard. People to whom we are witnessing can be asked, "Have you almost drowned, or have you seen someone who almost drowned or who actually drowned? What do people do when they are drowning and realize they can't get out of the water by their own efforts?" They look to see if anyone is near enough to help. Next, they want to know if any person is physically able to help them. Lastly, they call on anyone who is willing to rescue or to save them from drowning.

The potential rescuer not only has to be near enough and fully able, but also willing to endanger his or her life to rescue a stranger. This is illustrated by an athlete friend of mine who was at that same lake when he was fourteen years of age. A ten-year-old boy was starting to drown, and he got the attention of my friend to help. My friend Mike swam to him and saved him from drowning. Imagine the appreciation Mike received and the satisfaction he had because he risked his life to save the boy.

As a drowning child cries out to be rescued, sinners must cry out to the Lord to be saved. Sinners who realize they are going to die in sin need to see Jesus, Jehovah God, as the one who already gave His life, who is alive and fully able to rescue them. All they have to do is confess that Jesus is Lord, to believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, and to call

on Jesus' name (Rom. 10:9, 13). By the way, about seven years later when he was in college, my friend Mike called out to Jesus to rescue him from his sin. When he saved the drowning boy, he illustrated physically exactly what he needed spiritually—to be rescued!

## 1 JOHN 5:9-13

This passage presents an effective object lesson for witnessing to a person who is religious and believes that eternal life is received in a ceremony, through a church, or by his or her good works. A tract or piece of paper and a Bible are all that you need for this illustration. First, read 1 John 5:9-13. Take the tract and say that it represents eternal life "*that God has given to us.*" Explain that "eternal" means Christ paid for our sins and earned eternal life for us so we can receive it as a gift from God. We could not earn it. Eternal life, as John 17:3 defines it, means to know God now and forever in a personal relationship.

Then say, "This Bible represents Jesus in the object lesson of receiving eternal life from God." The perfection of Christ as a person, His perfect life on earth, and His perfect death and resurrection are what this book represents. Place the tract (eternal life) into the book (Jesus Christ). God's testimony about His Son is that eternal "*life is in his Son.*" This emphasizes that the gift of eternal life is not in an organization (a church), or a ceremony (baptism, communion, confirmation, circumcision), but in a Person.

To conclude what God does to give eternal life to any of us humans as sinners, I smile and say, "Guess what person I get to be in this object lesson? I will represent God the Father." Quickly add, "Far be it from me as a sinner who deserves hell according to God's Word that I should think I am God. But in this illustration, as God I am offering the gift of eternal life to a sinner." Ask, "How does a sinner get eternal life?" Extend the Bible that has the tract in it toward the unsaved religious person. As he reaches out his hand to take the Bible, emphasize that eternal life is in the Son. The hand reaching to take eternal life by receiving the Son is like prayer from the heart reaching out to receive Christ by faith alone. Emphasize that you cannot pull out the tract from the Bible, because God says that "*this life is in his Son.*"

Explain that God sees only two religions in this world—those who have received His Son and those who have not received His Son—the "haves" and the "have nots" as 1 John 5:12 says: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Emphasize the difference between believing facts about Jesus Christ (that He was a historical figure such as George Washington) and believing *on* Jesus Christ as the One who earned the gift of eternal life. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

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**Tony Miller** is pastor emeritus of Morningside Baptist Church in Greenville, SC.



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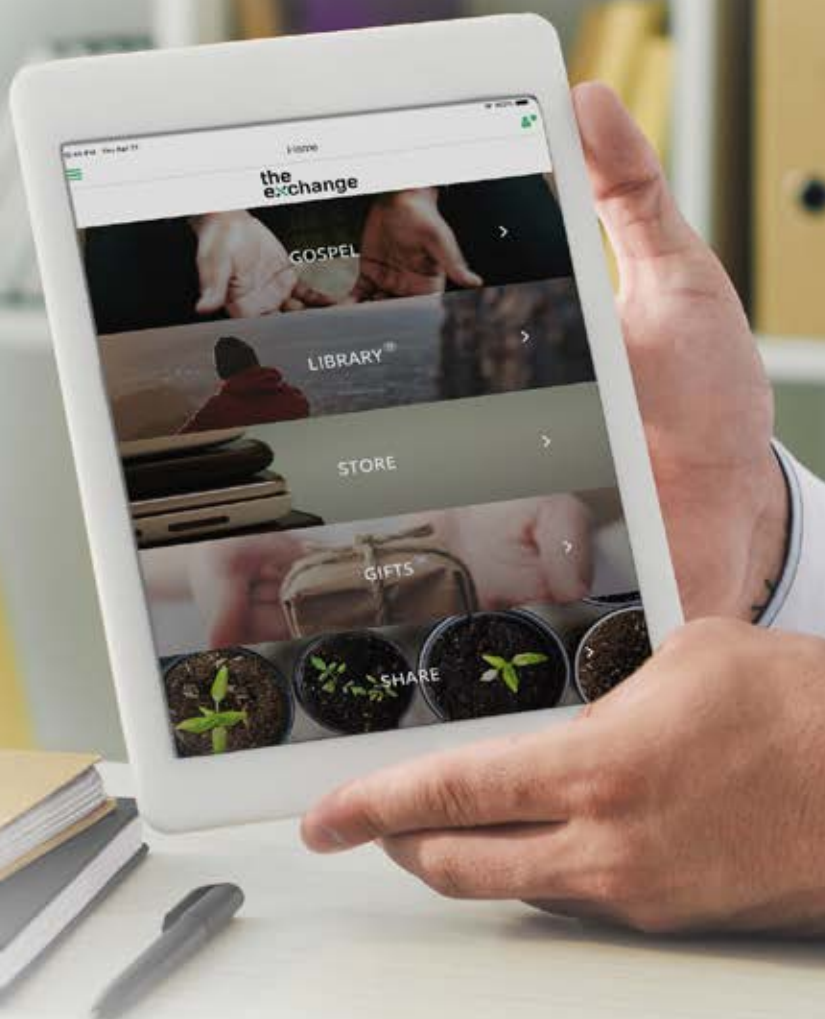
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# The News Is Great— So Innovate!

**N**orm Whan, the developer of the highly effective calling program “The Phone’s for You,” was challenged by people of his day who questioned whether Jesus would have used a phone to reach people. Norm Whan was convinced that Jesus used every means at His disposal. Whan’s innovative use of the phone was greatly used to bring many to Christ. He said, “We don’t know if Jesus would have used phones in His day. We do know He is using them now.”\* One of the most innovative tools of our day is digital technology. The question is not *if* we should use technology to share the gospel; the question is *how* should we use it?

Consider the far-reaching benefits of livestreaming church services. The year 2020 opened our eyes to this valuable resource. Many churches, even small ministries, who responded quickly and utilized livestreaming and other social-media tools during the pandemic, saw phenomenal growth. Our forerunners, the pioneers of the Independent Baptist movement, were great innovators. Perhaps some of the methods they used in the 1960s and 1970s seem dated now; however, they were groundbreaking in their day. It’s time for churches to embrace the power of innovation once again. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul showed his commitment to innovation through strategically adapting to the various cultures of his day. He summed up his commitment with these powerful words: “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22b).

At The Exchange ([exchangemessage.org](http://exchangemessage.org)), we believe it’s not enough to be intentional with the gospel. We must also be strategic.

## STRATEGICALLY RELATIONAL

In a culture that is trending post-Christian, many with whom we share the gospel are skeptical or even antagonistic. A genuine believer who forms a relationship with an unbeliever brings Jesus up close and personal through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Philip had a skeptical friend! But when he asked Nathaniel to “come and see” Jesus for himself, Philip was demonstrating his belief that if his friend got close to Jesus, Jesus would reveal Himself. As we spend time with our friends, we allow Jesus to



manifest Himself through us (2 Cor. 4:7). An authentic relationship with an unbeliever affords more time with more truth versus brief encounters with a brief gospel. The tools we use to share our faith should never replace relationships. They should facilitate relationships.

## STRATEGICALLY RELEVANT

While technological resources may not be necessary to effectively reach unbelievers, they can provide a relevant format for people who consume most of their information via screens. Believers don't make the gospel relevant; it is timelessly relevant to meet the real needs of the human soul. But isn't it possible that we can make the gospel seem irrelevant to some when we package it in an outdated way?

Let's consider some ways to effectively use technology to reach people with the gospel. One of the best places to start is through your own church website. While all churches need to include content unique to their various ministries, here are a few essentials for every church website.

- Make your website modern and clean. (The current trend is minimalistic versus busy.) Though it might be costly to rebuild your website, it may prove to be one of the best investments you can make to reach your community. There is significant personal preference involved in website design. What looks good to some may not look good to others. At The Exchange we have chosen to aim all our materials at the young eyes of our future. For us, the only way to have young eyes is to borrow or hire them!
- Include plenty of good pictures of happy people participating in attractive spaces in your meeting place. After all, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Good pictures not only attract guests to visit your church, but they also help your guests know what to expect when they come.
- Your service location and meeting times should be prominent and easy to find.
- Make sure your website is viewable on a mobile device, as this is the source most people use to search.

- Livestreaming has become a necessity. It is the new way guests visit your church. Investing in a good online experience is genuinely worth it. In addition to good equipment, consider your lighting, the background, good sound, and simply making it easy to find and play your livestreamed service.
- Describe your church in words that are meaningful to your unchurched community. Some of the words often used to describe churches are meaningless and sometimes confusing to an unbeliever. View your website through the eyes of an unbeliever rather than just through a believer's eyes.
- Your website needs a clear and compelling gospel presentation that includes an invitation to pursue learning more. This is a great place to insert a call-to-action button. (Both The Exchange gospel videos and The Exchange Message App are available as embeds for your church website.)

I was asked to write this article to share how The Exchange is using online and digital resources to reach unbelievers. We are passionate about multiplying laborers for God's harvest and providing evangelism tools to help believers share their faith. But we do not see ourselves as experts. We are just one of many organizations that are creating digital evangelism and discipleship resources.

- Jerry McCorkle at Spread Truth is passionate about reaching the world with the gospel and is committed to creating effective digital tools ([spreadtruth.com/gospel-sharing-tools](http://spreadtruth.com/gospel-sharing-tools)).
- Will Galkin, one of the best gospel communicators I know, has created the Five Questions video series as a means of engaging unbelievers with the gospel ([fivequestions.tv](http://fivequestions.tv)).
- The folks at Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, are sharing their faith by their "This Is My Story" proj-

ect. They are helping people tell their stories through an interview process that collects interesting aspects of their lives before and after their conversion. The Calvary staff then helps them write their own story in a tract, often introducing a crisis moment first and then explaining the gospel. The tracts include audio links for more of the story. This link will help you investigate this project as an option for people in your church: [glimpsesofcalvary.com/this-is-my-story](http://glimpsesofcalvary.com/this-is-my-story).

- The Exchange Gospel Video  
The Exchange has developed some tools that we believe you will find to be helpful and effective. The first is The Exchange gospel video, a simple introduction to God as a divine person and how anyone can have a life-changing relationship with Him.



The viewer is introduced to four of God's greatest attributes—God is holy and cannot tolerate our sin. God is just and cannot overlook our sin. His just nature demands that He judge us. But God is also loving and has reached out to us. He has provided a way for us to be close to Him that satisfies the demands of His holy, just nature. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He offers to make an exchange with us, replacing our sinful record with His perfect record. Finally, God is gracious and offers salvation from sin and death as a gift.

The Exchange gospel video is available in two formats.

- The first is an embeddable twenty-minute video. The full video is found



on the resources page of our website: [exchangemessage.org/resources](http://exchangemessage.org/resources). You don't need permission to embed this free video. Please reach out to me if you need assistance getting it embedded on your website.

- The second format consists of five two-to-five-minute videos presented in an online course format. Many people will not watch an entire twenty-minute video but may be willing to watch a series of short videos. The Exchange gospel videos can also be accessed in The Exchange Message App.

## THE EXCHANGE MESSAGE APP



Our most effective digital evangelism and discipleship tool is The Exchange Message App. This free download is in both the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store. (The app has gone through several updates, so make sure you have the latest features by updating your app.)

The app offers two primary tools for sharing the gospel:

1. *The Exchange Experience* is a digital gospel tract that can be read in fifteen minutes or can be condensed to use as a presentation tool to guide a friend through a gospel conversation.
2. *The Exchange Responsive Reader* is where you can find several Bible studies that will give a thorough understanding of the gospel over time.

## HERE'S HOW THEY WORK!

### The Exchange Experience

As you open the app, you are greeted with welcome pages that lead you to personalize your app. The Exchange Experience is a compelling gospel presentation using God's holiness, justice, love, and grace to help an unbeliever understand the gospel. Responsive illustrations of the core concepts help the reader stay engaged and better understand the truths. As the reader taps the screen, he interacts with the message one concept at a time. The central message of The Exchange is beautifully illustrated in the "God Is Loving" section. On the cross God made Jesus to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Jesus. Because the reader personalized the app at the beginning, his name is used to really drive this truth home.

There are two ways to use The Exchange Experience.

- **Reader Mode** allows a person to read the full presentation of the gospel, scrolling through the content at his own pace. More buttons throughout can be tapped to access more Scripture and answer commonly asked questions. Using the "More" button the reader can toggle between ESV, KJV, or Spanish versions of the Bible.
- **Presenter Mode** allows believers to guide a friend through the gospel, facilitating one-on-one gospel conversations. The words are minimized, leaving the Bible verses and the interactive illustrations. Again, the "More" button helps the believer by providing more verses and answers to common questions.

### The Exchange Responsive Reader

You may wonder why we call it a responsive reader. The Bible studies are written in a question-and-answer format. Your friend can read the question and the Bible verse and then write his or her answers. Just tap on the answer block and start writing. You can read and record answers without being connected to the Internet. To access your answers on multiple devices, just log in using the same username.

Any of The Exchange Bible studies can be added to your library through in-app purchases in the store. Your books will

then appear in Gifts. If you want the book for yourself, tap the "add to my library" button, and you can immediately access the book in your library. If you want to give the book to your friend, choose that option, and an e-mail is generated that explains to your friend how he can receive and use this gift. Just imagine sending a digital Bible study that your friend can instantly access—and neither of you left your home. We want to reach the world, so the app is geofenced, making all books free downloads outside of North America. So all purchases made in the USA help supply gospel tools free of charge to the rest of the world.

With The Exchange Message App believers can share the gospel anywhere, on any device, using e-mail, social media, or even text messaging. Sharing the gospel is one of the greatest kindnesses we can show to our fellow man.

Innovative digital tools are now available at our fingertips. You may prefer paper tools. I understand that—but have you ever found yourself wishing you had a gospel tract with you but didn't? Nathan Childs in South Africa faced this problem. He writes, "I had only planned a brief meeting with Lester, but the Spirit of God clearly opened the door to witness. Unfortunately, I didn't have my Bible with me; however, I did have The Exchange App on my phone. This was my first experience using the app to lead a soul to Christ. With tears falling on his cheeks, Lester was gloriously saved."

Just remember, tools don't use themselves. These tools demand committed believers who will invest time learning to use them. May I challenge you to find some digital gospel resources and make a commitment to use them to bring someone to Jesus?

Jeff Musgrave and his wife, Anna, planted Highlands Baptist Church in Centennial, Colorado, where Jeff served as pastor for twenty-six years. Since founding The Exchange in 2010, the Musgraves have been traveling in the US and elsewhere, helping believers in local churches to relationally share the gospel for God's glory.



\* Edward Dayton and David Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelism*, 196.



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## What Happened in Virginia?

Continued from page 13

### *What difference have you seen in state governance?*

**Tom Alvis:** A recent bill failed to include language that would carve out religious freedom for churches. Our governmental leaders paid attention to that and amended the bill.

**Byron Foxx:** Governor Youngkin has contacted us many times since the election, seeking biblical counsel.

### *For those reading this article who want to get involved, what would you recommend?*

**Tom Alvis:** We were really helped by Chad Connelly at FaithWins.US. Their mission statement declares that they are “dedicated to educating, activating and mobilizing faith leaders, helping them leverage their influence and impact within the governmental and political arena.” They do not endorse candidates, but they do place great stress on believers getting educated and involved.

**Byron Foxx:** Trust God to learn how to do what you need to do; He will lead you providentially. Pray, and encourage people to register to vote. Help them to think biblically in a post-Christian world. Read books such as *The Long War against God* by Henry Morris. Get them involved in maintaining election integrity. For pastors, look for someone in your church who enjoys studying public policy and legislation. Then ask that person to keep you posted on current events and legislation on the state and federal level. Gather pastors and churches for seasons of prayer for your state.

After interviewing these leaders, we were struck with the truth of Proverbs 11:28: “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.” Wealthy financiers trust their wealth to influence elections. But what these spiritual leaders did was organic. Their efforts flourished like a green branch in the spring. The media today is filled with news of various perverse pressure groups pushing for a change in

public policies. But consider the truth of Proverbs 12:3: “A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.” Again, the organic—the root of righteousness—prevails. What happened in Virginia was a spiritually motivated grass-roots effort. Would God be pleased to do the same thing in your state?

According to Dr. Michael Edwards, “The strategy of Faith Wins Virginia has been to take the concerns of our state and culture back to ‘the grassroots level.’ For too

long we have allowed professional politicians to dictate to us what is good for us and our community. However, we have a government of the people, by the people and for the people! ‘Grassroots’ is not just an interesting word; it is our essential path to victory.”

\* Sarah Lee and Hayden Ludwig, “States Banning or Restricting ‘Zuck Bucks’—UPDATED 04/13/2022,” April 13, 2022, accessed at <https://capitalresearch.org/article/states-banning-zuck-bucks>.

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# An Empty Closet

**H**ave you ever gotten discouraged in prayer? You have prayed earnestly for the salvation of someone, and from your viewpoint nothing has happened. Perhaps the person even got angry with you for your witness. I have experienced this. When discouragement occurs, I remind myself of my salvation.

During the beginning of my sophomore year at Clemson University, personal and school pressures mounted, and I crashed. My ability to concentrate deteriorated, causing my grades to decline. I started dropping a lot of weight. My friends were concerned. My mental function was so poor that I had to write lists of my classes, their times, and even the location of the building. When evening came, I could not tell you what had occurred that day. I was scared. Friends stated that I would rock and beat my head on the wall. I would find myself wandering around campus at night barefooted and cold. I did not know where I was or why I was there. My life was unraveling like a frayed rope. I tried to commit suicide more than once. It occupied my thoughts. I sincerely wanted to escape my torment.

Meanwhile, a fellow student named Joey took biochemistry as an elective and sat in front of me in that class. He was an outgoing, strong believer. Joey had watched me during the semester and had become concerned, especially for my soul. The Lord moved him to pray for me. So he made a “prayer closet” out of his dorm-room closet. Joey removed everything from that

closet except a pillow and a lamp. It was his quiet place to pray as he earnestly interceded on my behalf.

It was November; the semester was coming to a close. In biochemistry, while the professor was drawing the chemical formulas of the essential amino acids on the board, I tapped Joey and asked him if we could talk sometime. I didn’t know why I did this, but I came to understand it was an answer to Joey’s intercessions. We later talked, and I shared with him the details of my situation. Joey listened compassionately. He questioned the validity of my salvation. I could not believe what I was hearing. I became so angry. How dare he doubt my salvation! I had walked the aisle and been baptized. Didn’t that make me a Christian? I was the treasurer for Campus Crusade for Christ. Didn’t that make me a Christian? I was probably yelling these statements to him, but he remained calm. He asked me to consider going with him to his hometown where I could spend time with his Christian aunt. He said he did not know a mature Christian woman on campus who could help me. I stood up to leave. I arrogantly and sarcastically told Joey to pray for God to give me the desire to meet with his aunt. I did not know that he had been praying for me. But he smiled and said he would. I left.

Thanksgiving break came, and I went home to be with my parents. The “farm,” as our family affectionately called it, did not bring my soul the peace I sought. I was disappointed. That holiday weekend, surrounded by my loving family, was a lonely,

empty time for me. I decided that I had been acting foolishly. If Joey’s aunt could help, what was stopping me from going? Only pride. I decided to call Joey when we got back to campus, apologize for my outburst, and ask him if the offer to go to his aunt’s was still possible.

Meanwhile, during Thanksgiving, Joey talked with his aunt, uncle, and pastor. They covenanted to begin fasting and praying for me.

After returning to Clemson, I contacted Joey and asked if the offer was still available. He enthusiastically stated, “Yes!” So we agreed to leave for his aunt’s after our last class on Friday.

That Friday, after one week, the group of four intercessors stopped their fast. When Joey and I arrived, I was welcomed with love and care. Late that night, I put my faith and trust into Christ alone, and He delivered my soul. The Lord Jesus Christ set me free! He gave me His grace and peace. I have not been the same since.

Where would I be today if the risen Lord had not moved Joey to pray? So when I get discouraged in prayer for souls, I remember a young college student who emptied out his closet.

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Vera Jones and her husband, Frank, pastor of Faith Memorial Baptist Church, have served the Lord in full-time ministry for thirty-eight years. They have three married sons and six grandchildren. She enjoys cycling and indoor gardening.





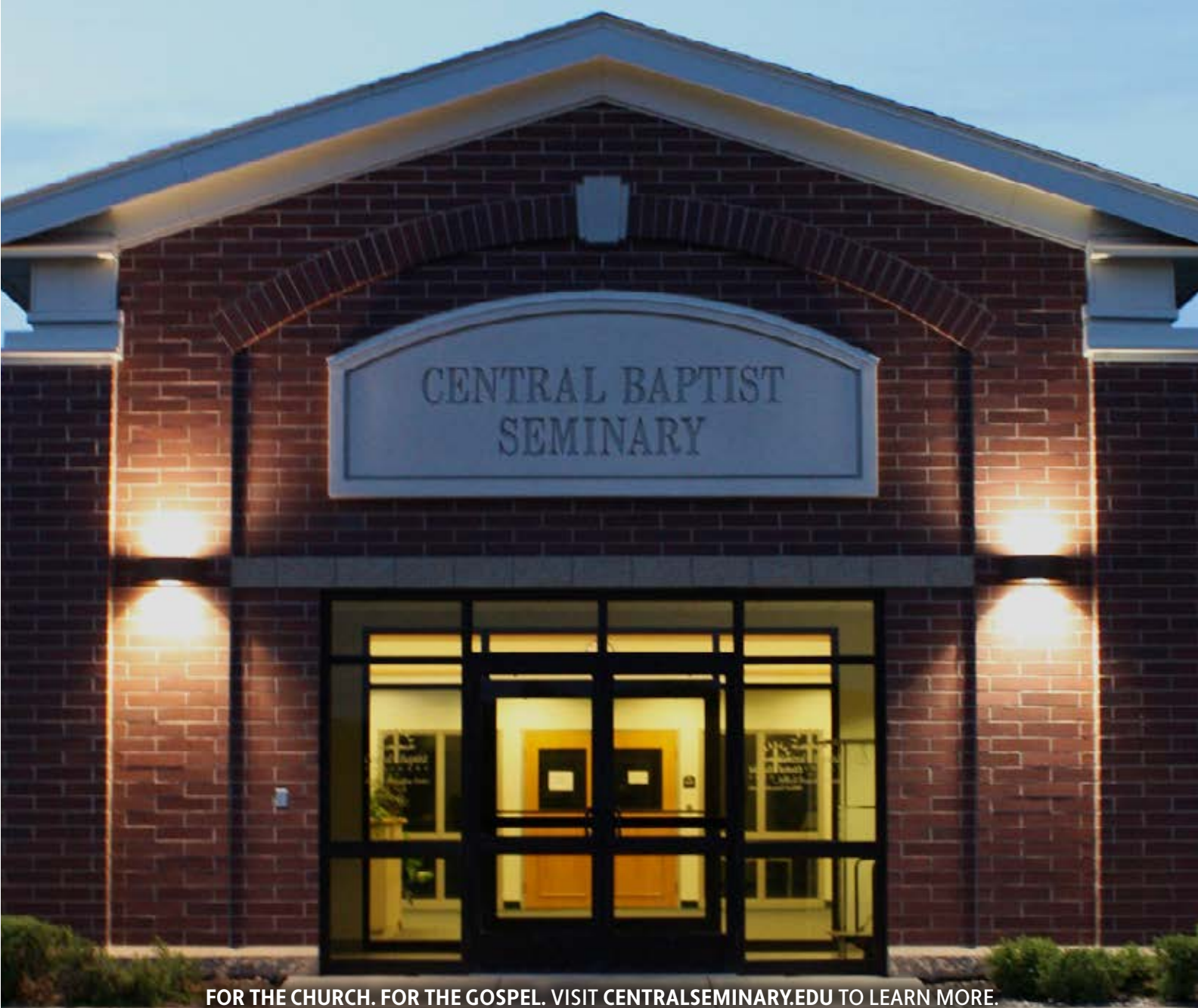


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**“Y**e that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence” (Isa. 62:6). That may sound like an exhortation to preach, but it’s not. It’s a call to pray. The phrase “make mention” translates the Hebrew verb to “remember” (*zakar*); but it’s also a *causative* form of the verb: *to cause to remember, remind*. God is not addressing those who *talk about* the Lord. He’s addressing those who *remind the Lord*. He’s not talking to preachers. He’s talking to pray-ers.

The phrase “keep not silence” is more literally rendered “no rest to you” or “no cessation to you.” It’s essentially paralleling the New Testament command to “pray without ceasing.” Pray about what? The answer is in the next sentence: “And give him no rest, **till he establish [Jerusalem], and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth**” (Isa. 62:7). *Give God no rest?* What a remarkable mandate! “Until he [establishes] Jerusalem and [makes] it a praise in the earth”? What a peculiar request!

Isaiah 62:6–7 is just the capstone to a larger context. To sense the significance of both mandate and request, you have to go back to Isaiah 60, where the Lord describes the abundance of wealth and blessing He has purposed to heap upon Israel. The magnitude of it is astounding. The glory of God will rise and shine upon Israel (60:1–2) so that Israel will become the gravitational center of all nations (60:3–4). God will gather the wealth of all the nations into Israel (60:5–9), cause the sons of foreigners to build up Jerusalem (60:10), bring the kings of the nations and their armies to serve Israel (60:10–12) and the prized flora from other nations to beautify the land (60:13). Israel’s former enemies will bow at their feet (60:14), and their once desolate land will become the “garden state” of the world (60:15). The best of the world’s resources and riches will be theirs (60:16–17) along with the peace and presence of their God (60:18–20). When God describes Israel’s central and exalted position among all the nations of the world (61:1–9), Isaiah is overwhelmed at this glorious future and exults in God’s gracious salvation and promised restoration of Israel (61:10–11).

After laying out in stunning detail what He promises to do for Israel, God issues an equally stunning command to His people to become collaborators with Him, through their prayers, in bringing about what He has already announced He will perform! Isaiah 62:6–7 is an exhortation to pray without ceasing for God’s fulfillment of these prophecies and, through prayer, to “not leave Him alone” about it until He fulfills what He said He would do.

Why would God require that weak, forgetful humans unceasingly remind Him to fulfill what He Himself has already sovereignly purposed and faithfully promised to perform? And more to the point, does this OT command have anything to do with us as NT believers? Are there any parallel exhortations in the New Testament?

## 2 PETER 3:12

Sincere prayer for promised providences is a mysterious yet divinely ordained means for hastening the coming of the day of God. Peter does not describe our “hastening unto the coming of the day of God”—as though we should be hurrying towards it. There is no “unto” in the text. The CSB translates this phrase as “earnestly desire”—but the word never carries that sense.” The verb simply means “to hurry,” “to hasten,” even “to facilitate. The verb is used in Isaiah 16:5 (LXX) to describe the Messiah’s sitting on the Davidic throne, “judging, and seeking judgment, and *hastening* righteousness.” What Peter is exhorting, then is believers’ *anticipating and advancing the parousia of the day of the Lord*. How?

## MATTHEW 6:10

Why did Jesus instruct His disciples specifically to pray, “Thy kingdom come”? Isn’t God’s kingdom going to come whether we pray this or not? Jesus’ instruction here is, if not an intentional echo, at least a NT summary of Isaiah 62:6 and related OT passages (yes, there are others; keep reading).

These petitions—“hallowed be thy name”; “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”—are not rote requests, mere matters of protocol for formal religious occasions. They are given to us by Jesus as paradigms (“When you pray, say this . . .”), patterns of the kinds of divine concerns on which our praying should focus. These are petitions of massive theological and eschatological scope, prayers that in a single breath encompass the whole breadth and sweep of God’s revealed, prophesied purposes for the earth. *Mean* them when you pray them. *Desire* them when you pray them. *Expect* them when you pray them; they are requests that will certainly be fulfilled. This is exactly what John prayed after seeing, in vision form, the fulfillment of this very request—the coming kingdom of God: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Because their scope reaches far beyond just Israel to include God’s ultimate purpose to glorify Himself in His people and among the nations, they are pertinent expectations for the Church to keep in mind and to participate in praying forward. But these petitions have immediate personal impact as well. To this same instruction, Jesus added: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Do you hear the connection back to the prayer instruction Jesus had given earlier? Seeking God’s kingdom doesn’t mean looking for it, as though it were hidden somewhere. It is an exhortation to *pursue* it. How? One way is through praying like Jesus taught: “Thy kingdom come.” When we do that, we are anticipating, participating, and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord, when God’s prophetic purposes will infallibly be fulfilled (Isa. 55:11). When we focus our prayerful attention on God’s work and on discerning His will from His Word so that

# Praying

His goals become ours, His passions become ours, His desires and ambitions and loves and values become ours—then we are becoming like Him.

## OTHER OLD TESTAMENT EXHORTATIONS

Several passages incorporate the necessity of prayer into explicitly unilateral prophetic passages. Isaiah 62 incorporates prayer into an eschatological prophetic passage. Jeremiah 29:10–14 incorporates prayer into a prophetic passage that has been, in part, historically fulfilled but that also has an eschatological edge to it.

For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. *Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.* And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

Likewise, Ezekiel 36:22–38 incorporates prayer into an eschatological prophetic passage: “Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them” (v. 37). Zechariah 12:1–10ff. fits into the same category, as God describes the grace-induced urge to call out to Him in supplications to do what He has said: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications” (v. 10).

All these passages raise the issue of the relationship between prayer and God’s prophetic purposes, human petition, and divine providence. How does my supplication make sense in light of God’s sovereignty? C. H. Spurgeon explained it this way:

My brethren, prayer is an essential part of the providence of God; so essential, that you will always find that when God delivers his people, his people have been praying for that deliverance. They tell us that prayer . . . cannot alter his purposes. We never thought it did; but prayer is a part of the purpose and plan, and a most effective wheel in the machinery of providence. The Lord sets his people praying, and then he blesses them.

There are many prophecies in which we can participate through prayer. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). Pray for God to establish Jerusalem and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isa.

60–62). Pray for “all Israel [to] be saved” (Rom. 11:26) as Paul did (Rom. 10:1). Pray for the purification of the sons of Levi so that they can offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:3). Pray for the conversion of Egypt and Assyria (Syria/Iraq, Isa. 19:23–25). Pray for Jordan (Jer. 48:47; 49:6). Pray for the coming of the Lord and the magnifying of His glory among all the nations (Ezek. 36). Pray for the coming of the kingdom, as Jesus taught (Matt. 6; Luke 11). Find out what else God has said He would do, and pray for Him to do it. He has authorized, invited, and exhorted His people to give Him no rest until He performs what He has promised. This kind of praying delights the heart of God and makes us more like Him in the process.

We are encouraged to make all our requests known to God, to unfold our hearts’ desires freely and frankly to Him. But a biblically informed view of God’s providence and prophetic purposes should guide what and how we pray. And an awareness of what is going on in the world will give you specifics to pray for as well. Praying for prophesied events guarantees that He is glorified and that we, as prayer participants with Him, are changed in the process.

## CONCLUSION

When you consider the history of Israel since the time of Christ, the events of the last one hundred years are hardly short of miraculous: the narrowly averted annihilation of European Jewry (1930s–40s); the astonishing resurrection of the ancient voice of Isaiah—a *complete* scroll of his prophecy among the “accidentally” discovered Dead Sea Scrolls (1947); and the utterly unprecedented and unlikely resurrection of the dead Nation of Israel, along with its functionally dead Hebrew language (1948). In that year the Jews received, via partition, a small piece of Palestine, but not Jerusalem. Surrounded by sworn enemies determined to exterminate them immediately, they had no formal military yet faced a major war and likely annihilation four decades in a row—*likely* because they were vastly outnumbered (in 1967, 70 million to 2 million), *annihilation* because that was (and remains) the express and intended purpose of their enemies. Against all odds they not only survived but triumphed and gained territory . . . including Jerusalem (in 1967). One piece of real estate they do not yet possess is the all-important Temple Mount—“the mountain of the LORD’s house” (Isa. 2:2). And 9500 feet away, on public display, is the 2200-year-old copy of a 2700-year-old prophecy that foretells exactly what is eventually going to happen to that Temple Mount—because it is the infallible divine word on the matter. The conclusions supported by a consistently literal interpretation of Isaiah (and the other prophets) should be that much easier for anyone to believe—and pray for—today than they have ever been in the history of the last nineteen centuries of the Church.

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

## Necessary Reminders

### EASTER AND COMMUNION

As I sit to write this article, we are heading toward Easter, the greatest holiday on a Christian's calendar and a highly significant necessary reminder to believers. When I pastored in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, I was the crazy pastor who had a sunrise service at sunrise. Because our church consisted primarily of new Christians, they also got up and joined me.

We would get our kids up at 5:30 AM, and I would play the *Majesty and Glory of the Resurrection* by Hearn and Fettke a little louder than normal. We would get to church all dressed up. I would stand in the pulpit, I would look out at the congregation and the first thing I would say is, "He is risen." And they would look back and respond, "He is risen indeed." That fact had changed all of our lives, and it was a thrill to come together to celebrate it. By the time you read this, Easter will be in your rear-view mirror, but I hope the reality of Easter thrills your soul just as much today as it did then.

Communion is a second necessary reminder. The reason we take communion is because we all so easily forget. God wants us to remember the price He paid for our salvation and never to take that for granted.

Another necessary reminder of what God did for me is to hear the testimony of a new believer. When people got baptized at our church, they gave their testimony. I hope the testimony of a new believer will remind you of the power of the gospel and cause you to rejoice that God is who He is and that He did what He did for us on the cross. I have changed her name, but this is one believer's testimony given the night she was baptized.

### A TESTIMONY

Good evening. My name is Sarah. I was born and raised in a Christian family. My mom told me that when I was four or five that I accepted Christ into my life. I may have, but nothing changed. I went to church regularly because we were forced to as children. As long as we were living in that house, we had to go to church.

At the age of five, my parents got divorced. That event in my life made me an angry, bitter person toward God. I was always told that I could rely on God to be my dad. I figured that because my dad left me, so would God. So I chose to leave God first.

Then I got to junior high. I went to a private Christian school. The only problem there was that these students had been going to school together since kindergarten. So all their cliques had been formed, and it was very difficult to fit in.

I spent the next three years being bitter and angry at God and the world. Due to my diagnosis of having hypothyroidism at the age of nine, I began to struggle with my weight in junior high. Because I was not thin and like all the other popular girls, things changed fast.

I went to high school and things fell apart. Making friends was hard, as I was in a school where I knew very few people. I was always getting picked on. In grade eleven I had had enough. I tried to commit suicide. My mom ended up catching me before it was done. I remember being so mad at her. She would not let me be alone till I promised her I would still be alive when she woke up the next morning. So then I had to come up with another way of dealing with my problems.

I turned to smoking. I met many interesting people outside the smoke doors at my high school. They became my friends because they accepted me no matter what. They always seemed to have a solution to all of my problems. Drugs and alcohol became my way of dealing with life's struggles.

I still continued over these years to go to church—as was my parents' rule, and homelessness did not seem like a good idea to me.

I wore a mask at church. I couldn't let anyone at my church know I was struggling. My parents were well known at our church and were very involved in the church. People always just figured that because my parents were strong Christians that I was as well. I would show up at church on Sunday and the rest of my week would be drinking and doing drugs and partying with my friends. That was my life until August 2007.

I knew my life had to change. Then I met a man—while I was visiting Edmonton—from Calgary. He brought me to Meadowlands Baptist Church. For the first time, I actually heard the gospel message there. I chose not to respond, though, because I did not trust God at all after what I had been through. I met most of the college and career group and had never felt more welcomed before. I left and wanted to come back to Meadowlands. I came a few more times. I then decided that if my life was going to change, I needed to get away from those I hung out with.

As it turned out, I ended up losing my job, and so I decided to look for work in Edmonton. I found a job right away. I was surprised it all happened so fast. Then I

Continued on page 37





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### September 13, 2022 NYC Regional Fellowship

Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
718.615.1002  
Coordinator: Matt Recker

### October 15, 2022 New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)  
Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Rd.  
Dover, NH 03820  
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

### October 17-18, 2022 Central Regional Fellowship

Wheatland Baptist Church  
1139 McKinley  
McPherson, KS 67460  
Coordinator: David Byford

## 2023

### January 31, 2023 Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church  
6260 West 4th St.  
Greeley, CO 80634  
970.346.8610  
Coordinator: Dan Unruh

### February 6-7, 2023 FBFI Winter Board Meeting

Colonial Hills Baptist Church  
8140 Union Chapel Rd.  
Indianapolis, IN 46240

### March 6-8, 2023 South Regional Fellowship

Keystone Baptist Church  
15 Keystone Ln.  
Berryville, VA 22611  
Coordinator: Tony Facenda

### April 23-24, 2023 Northwest Regional Fellowship

Monroe Baptist Church  
1405 West Main St.  
Monroe, WA 98272  
Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

### April 24-25, 2023 Wyoming Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church  
646 N. Tyler Avenue  
Pinedale, WY 82941

### May 9-11, 2023 Philippines Regional Fellowship

Bob Jones Memorial Bible College  
125 Matahimik St.  
Quezon City  
Philippines 1101

### June 12-14, 2023 FBFI Annual Fellowship

Faith Baptist Bible College  
900 Northwest 4th St.  
Ankeny, IA 50023

## 2024

### March 11-12, 2024 Northwest Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church  
1375 Irving Rd.  
Eugene, OR 97404  
Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

### April 15-17, 2024 South Regional FBFI Fellowship

Catawba Springs Baptist Church  
Raleigh, NC

### June 10-12, 2024 FBFI Annual Fellowship

Tri-City Baptist Church  
6953 W 92nd Ln.  
Westminster, CO 80021

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## News From All Over



For ninety-two years MGM International has enjoyed fulfilling the mission agency's vision of "multiplying leaders for the great Hispanic harvest" as MGMI missionaries plant and serve in local churches on the mission field, endeavoring to reproduce other faithful Bible-believing churches. Since 2005 Dr. Dave Shumate has served as general director, a position that was held previously by Dr. Dick Mercado, the son of MGMI founder Leonardo Mercado. Although Dr. Shumate will continue to minister with MGMI in a role that will build on MGMI's vision for the development of Hispanic leaders, his long-term partnership with International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona, has increased as he has accepted the position as the college and seminary's chief academic officer. Dr. Shumate, with the unanimous approval of the board,



has asked Dr. Dan Wokaty to become MGMI's next general director. The goal is for Dr. Shumate to hand over the position officially during the first quarter of 2023.



On May 6, 2022, Dr. Mark Batory transitioned from being the executive director of Gospel Fellowship

Association Missions. Mark and his wife, Paula, will take their forty-five years of experience to mentor God's present and future servants and share the joy of a lifetime of service to the King of kings and Lord of lords.



Jon and Andrea Crocker, missionaries in Mexico City, have accepted God's redirection in their lives

as Jon becomes the new executive director of GFA. Jon is uniquely prepared for this challenge and will begin in this role immediately, though the Crockers will remain in Mexico City for some time to provide for a smooth transition for that ministry.



Pastor Jim Neighbors has retired after pastoring Bluelick Bible Church in Lima, Ohio, for a remarkable forty-four years. In 1978 he assumed the pastorate of a church with thirteen members and a budget deficit, supporting six missionaries. He and his wife, Suzanne, leave a church with new buildings, no debt, and around two hundred members that give annual support to over fifty missionaries throughout the world.

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FRONTLINE

# Regional Reports

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL FOUNDATIONS BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

Jay Sprecher

The Wyoming section of the Rocky Mountain Regional Foundations Baptist Fellowship, in conjunction with Northwest Baptist Missions, met April 25–26 in Sinclair, Wyoming. Pastor Josh and Alana Spencer and Pastor Emeritus Mike and Sandy Holmes of Sinclair Baptist Church hosted the meeting. The theme was “Ministering in the New Normal.” Speakers Pastor Ron Ehmann, Pastor Ted York, Pastor James Johnson, and Pastor Caleb Howe encouraged, rebuked, and challenged attendees with a mixture of youthful enthusiasm and experienced wisdom. The states of Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho were represented. The fellowship was also blessed with a special ladies’ fellowship time conducted by Alana Spencer and Sandy Holmes.

There were twenty-eight pastors, missionaries, and wives registered. Many thanks are extended to the members of Wyoming’s most unique church. Next year’s fellowship will be hosted by Pastor Ted and Teresa York at First Baptist Church, Pinedale, Wyoming, on April 24–25.



## 2022 ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP

Doug Wright

**“Y**ou don’t have the luxury of feeling sorry for yourself in ministry. . . . You have a role, and it includes putting up with certain things for the sake of Christ.” Those who attended the 101<sup>st</sup> Annual Fellowship might recognize that statement from Dr. Gary Reimers. It was just one of the dozens of nuggets of wisdom imparted to us at the event. The theme of the Fellowship was “All These Things at

Thy Word,” and it was hosted by Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

Seven speakers were assigned a topic extending from that theme:

Wayne Van Gelderen, “Believing Evangelism”

Taigen Joos, “Scriptural Worship”

Gary Reimers, “Christologically Focused”

Mike Harding, “Theologically Grounded and Growing”

Ron Allen, “Scripturally, Lovingly United”

Bruce McAllister, “Perseveringly Faithful”

Kevin Schaal, “Culturally Non-Conformist”

The speakers handled their topics expertly, which included practical application. Each service confronted the listeners with decisions to be made for Christ.

In addition to the spiritual refreshment from messages and workshops, Mount Calvary Baptist Church went above and beyond as hosts. Pastor Minnick, his staff, and the people of their ministry had obviously bathed the meeting in prayer and sacrificed time both before and during the meeting. The music itself made the conference special. The orchestra, choir, specials, and fully involved congregational

singing were a model of biblical worship. Their care of us between sessions and for meals made fellowship easy and enjoyable. Our heartfelt thanks go out to them. This church family showed themselves to be among the best as they fulfilled their objective of encouraging men and ladies in ministry.

This year’s fellowship more than accomplished the FBFI goal of “providing a rallying point for Fundamental Baptists seeking personal revival.” Let me encourage all of you to make it a priority to attend both the regional and national fellowships. During one of the panel discussions someone asked, “Why should a young man join the FBFI?” One of the many answers was evident at this fellowship—you will be personally encouraged to glorify God “through the uncompromising fulfillment of the Great Commission” (from the FBFI Mission Statement). By spending time with friends in ministry and hearing from speakers like the men listed above, you will be refreshed and encouraged. You are not alone, and you can maintain biblical integrity.

Next year’s Annual Fellowship will be held June 12–14 at Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa. Please plan to join us.





## Rewarding, Fulfilling, and Fruitful

**S**erving as Police Chaplain the past 23½ years has been a very important part of my life. I've made hundreds of friends. We have shared a lot of crazy experiences and "close calls" on the streets, many laughs, and a few tears along the way as well. Some of my most memorable days have included

- Training with the motor cops in Jefferson County.
- A day of driving instruction at the State Patrol training facility in Golden, Colorado.
- Honing my skills at the firing range (without injuring anyone).
- Accompanying the SWAT Team on their competitive twenty-four-hour team run through the mountains
- And the many days and nights supporting all those working through

the Jessica Ridgeway case in 2012—the abduction and gruesome murder of a ten-year-old girl.

Though I was not a commissioned officer, I was accepted very soon into the "brotherhood" of law enforcement—the thin blue line—back in the fall of 1998. My experiences included spending time at "Ground Zero" in September of 2001, standing alongside NYPD officers in the smoldering rubble of the Twin Towers; and sitting beside my Westminster Police Department (WPD) officers in the freezing cold and the baking sun. All these experiences have changed my life.

I experienced the daily trauma of a cop's life—horrific death, tragic loss, and inhuman behavior. I wouldn't trade those experiences for anything, though. They have helped shape me and mold me into a closer walk with my Lord. I have witnessed mir-

acle after miracle of God's protection over the officers at the WPD. His divine intervention was obvious in protecting them from serious injury, and yes, certain death. Multiple times over the years I was quick to point out circumstances that defied logical explanation: "God did that!"

Over my fifty-plus years of ministry life, I can say without hesitation that my role as a Police Chaplain has been the most rewarding, fulfilling, and fruitful part of those years. I have served at the hospital, the courtroom, and the graveside. I held a spontaneous prayer meeting for a young child's heart-transplant operation—what a joy to see our training room fill with scores of officers and support personnel, supporting the infant daughter of a police sergeant. The retirement and promotions celebrations all contributed to my feeling an intimate part of this family. And I will never forget the support from the department when I lost my own wife to cancer in 2012. The processional motorcade was completely overwhelming.

From the myriad of experiences, one week in particular continues to bring me joy and a humble gratefulness. In 2008 I had the privilege of directing and preaching two separate funeral services. The first was that of Darrell, a Marine Corp veteran and retired Westminster Police Officer who had served for thirty-four years at the department. Darrell had succumbed to cancer only two years after his retirement. What a joy to lead him to the Savior in his hospital room just a couple months before his death. Amazingly, Darrell had been the Grand Master of the Freemasons of Colorado! Nearly eight hundred attended his funeral, where I carefully presented the gospel and shared his personal testimony.

Just four days later I conducted the funeral service for the lead investigator for the Denver District Attorney's Office. His nephew was one of my officers at the



Photo from left to right: Larry Robbins; Bob Dowling, retired commander (former Chaplain supervisor who was involved in the original start of the Chaplain program 23 years ago); new chaplain Chris Knudsen, whom I have been training and disciplining for over a year; Current Chaplain supervisor and head of SWAT, Commander Trevor Materasso.

WPD. Approximately four hundred attended this funeral, made up almost entirely of attorneys and members of the Denver Police Department. Somewhere around 1200 individuals in total—many of whom surely did not know the Lord—heard the good news of Jesus Christ that week!

The best times, though, were the hundreds and hundreds of occasions when I rode “shotgun” with my officers, cruising the streets of Westminster, all hours of the day and night. I have enjoyed more opportunities to fulfill my calling than most pastors have in their entire lifetime. I am blessed.

It is with some sadness that I now conclude this time of my life by retiring from my volunteer position as Chaplain with

the Westminster Police Department. I have served under four different police chiefs, three mayors, and three city managers. It is time. No regrets. I will always pray for my Westminster Police family—the current employees and officers as well as those who have come and gone for more than two decades.

Romans 13:1–4: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and

thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

Larry Robbins has been an associate pastor at Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado, for nearly thirty-nine years. In addition to his endorsement as an FBFI Chaplain, Larry also holds credentials from the Rocky Mountain Police and Fire Chaplains, the International Conference of Police Chaplains, the National Organization for Victims Assistance (NOVA), and the American Association of Christian Counselors.



## Necessary Reminders

Continued from page 32

found a place to live. I moved out one week later. The college and career group was great as they helped me move.

I got involved where I could at Meadowlands to get to know people. I then became interested in the membership class. I began to go. After the first class, I had a few questions about Christianity. I guess I just always assumed that I was saved, when in reality, I wasn't. Pastor Jim recommended that a girl from college and career and I should chat about what we had just learned. So she and I e-mailed often that week, and I came to the realization that if I was to die

at that moment, I would not go to heaven. So she and I got together that Sunday afternoon and talked about salvation.

I came to the realization that I, too, was a sinner, lost without God. I realized that the punishment for sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. Jesus Christ died on the cross to save me from ultimate punishment of hell for eternity. Without God I am nothing. Then she left and gave me time to think.

That afternoon, September 16, 2007, in the quietness of my house, I accepted Jesus Christ into my life and to be Lord of my life. So now I am choosing to be baptized because I want to show everyone that I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back.

Life won't always be perfect, but I have an amazing group of friends here at Meadowlands. God has blessed me with the most amazing friends here that I know will help me grow in my faith. I cannot wait to see where God will lead me and what He will do in my life. Thank you.

May amazing grace never stop being amazing, and may we continually rejoice that Jesus rose from the dead just as He said.

**Jim Tillotson** serves as president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.

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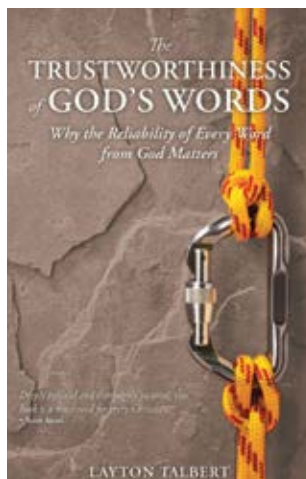




## Book Review:

# *The Trustworthiness of God's Words*

by Layton Talbert



**T**he Talbert Trilogy on trusting God of *Not By Chance: Learning to Trust a Sovereign God* (BJU, 2001), *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (BJU, 2007), and now *The Trustworthiness of God's Words: Why the Reliability of Every Word from God Matters* (Christian Focus, 2022) reflects more than two decades of Talbert's incisive, practical, and devotional study into the majesty of God's sovereignty and the matchless integrity of His character. If you've not read all three, you should. If you read them in order, you'll find each volume a delectable feast, and you'll also find the fare increasingly rich.

I hesitate to write more, wishing instead that you'd simply study the Scripture with Talbert's works in hand. In them, Talbert repeatedly asks (and Scripturally answers) many of the hard questions that touch where theology and life must come together. Before reading, if one will essentially repeat the request Philip made to Jesus, "Show us the Father," one will find in the diligent reading of any of these titles an abundant answer to his prayer.

In Talbert's most recent work *The Trustworthiness of God's Words* (276 pp.), Talbert proves himself again a reliable Scripture guide to the reliability of the words of God. He invites us to think the thoughts of God about the words of God. He challenges us to share the incarnate Christ's confidence in the integrity of God regarding His speech (85-111). Doing so alters our living, our praying, our inclinations to worry, our responses to temptations, our reading of Scripture. . . . it transforms our perspective on all of life. It unmask the poverty of our "own understanding" and the frailty of counsel rooted

in any source outside God. Trust in God's integrity, Talbert says, "is a willingness to rely on what is believed that produces a sense of *confidence, safety, security, optimism*" (25). Trust is readily willing to be governed alone by the words that proceed from God's mouth, especially when His words run counter "to the opinions of the wise of this world" (116).

Part of God's passion for His glory is His passion for His integrity—that He means what says, that He has said exactly what He meant to say, and that He will unfailingly do all that He has said. We glorify God and vindicate His integrity when we trust His words entirely—all of them (14).

*Trustworthiness* has three primary sections. Talbert builds a foundation carefully (chs. 2–6), helping the reader see from multiple scriptural vantage points "that God jealously defends His integrity in so many ways and places, that the integrity of His words is obviously deeply important to God, and that this theme has the profoundest implications for the glory of God" (13–14). God's integrity is a truth so often overlooked, yet so abundantly evident as to comprise the warp and woof of Scripture. Talbert helps us see that God hid His passion for His integrity in plain sight. "If there is a hair's breadth between God's words and God's actions, between what He says and what He does, God forfeits His integrity" (51). If God's words are not trustworthy, then it is impossible for us to know Him and see any of His glorious attributes (ch. 3). "The veracity of God simply means that God tells the truth. Always. He does not and cannot deceive in what He says"

(77). Our faith is most rightly exercised when we come to have the same view of God's words as He does.

The "Practical Applications" (Part 2, chs. 7–11) are powerfully presented, fleshing out the working nature of trust (initially defined so well in ch. 2) while taking aim at the temptations that typically subvert our trust. Again and again, the reader is brought back to Talbert's early assertion that God's words "never misinform us about past occurrences, they never misrepresent present realities, and when it comes to future promises or prophecies they will never malfunction" (17). While highlighting the integrity of the words of God, Talbert helpfully arms the reader with careful exegesis of a wide variety of passages enabling us to see the applicational potency of the Father's reliability for His children. After all, why does God even bother to give objective, detailed promissory and predictive words to us in writing? So He will not forget them? No, He does so that when we doubt His character, we can be visibly reminded that He faithfully keeps His word.

In "Worldview Implications" (Part 3, chs. 12–14), we comprehend that God's words comprise a much larger storyline through both the Old and New Testaments that also magnifies the integrity of God. Talbert's poetic prose artfully summarizes the story succinctly:

the Bible is . . . from beginning to end, a story. A long story. A single, unified narrative of reality that flows like the river out of Eden, tumbles down through time, and deltas into distant vistas beyond the book of Revelation. Sometimes rushing headlong, growing as each narrative along the way, each psalm and sermon, each prophecy and poem, trickle into it like tributaries to swell the stream. It's not just a true story; it is the true story. (207).

Any believer desiring to have his faith increased, every parent, counselor, or pastor, will find *Trustworthiness* a timely cordial not only for his own soul, but as a resource with which to minister strengthening encouragement to others. Its pages reflect and prompt prolonged meditation. Your heart will burn as the Scriptures are explained.

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# A Solemn Warning

**W**e read in Hebrews 3:12, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” This is an admonition that we must take seriously. Unbelief always leads to heartbreaking grief and dismay.

We see this truth in the account given in the Book of Joshua. In chapter 6 the Lord gave clear instructions to the people of Israel regarding the destruction of the city of Jericho and not taking anything as spoil for themselves. Joshua 6:17 states, “And the city shall be accursed. Even it, and all that are therein.” God told the Israelites in the next verse, “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.” So Joshua gave the Lord’s message to the people, and they defeated the city of Jericho and obeyed God’s command not to take anything for themselves. It was a great victory; and the Israelites anticipated another great victory in defeating the much smaller city of Ai.

The men of Israel spied out Ai and told Joshua that he didn’t need to send a huge army. An army of two or three thousand soldiers would be enough, because Ai was such a small city. So Israel attacked the city of Ai with three thousand soldiers—and were astonishingly defeated. Joshua 7:4–5 says, “So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men

of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men.” Joshua was stunned; he rent his clothes, fell down on the ground and started praying. God answered him in verses 10–11, “Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.” Then the Lord told Joshua what to do next in verse 12: “Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.” So Joshua called the children of Israel before him; and it was discovered that Achan was guilty of disobeying God’s command. He confessed in verse 21, “When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.”

Then we see the tragic result of Achan’s sin: all of his family members and possessions were stoned to death and burned. Joshua 7:25b states, “And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.” This is a pathetic and sorrowful story of a man who did not obey what God had commanded. Not only was Achan put to death for his disobedience, but his entire family was also. Besides that, thirty-six Israelite soldiers were killed because of his

sin. And the wives and children of those men no doubt deeply grieved the loss of their husbands and fathers. One man, Achan, caused all this pain and loss! This ought to be a solemn warning to the Lord’s people who are reading this article.

First, we must realize we cannot hide our sins from God. Psalm 90:8 says, “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.” Proverbs 28:13 declares, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.” We read in Numbers 32:23b, “And be sure your sin will find you out.” Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

Second, we must realize our sin does great damage to ourselves and others. Romans 8:13 states, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” Romans 8:6 warns, “For to be carnally minded is death.” Remember how the sin of just one man caused so much grief, sorrow, shame, and loss.

I would encourage you to get down on your knees and ask the Lord to cleanse you of some hidden sin while you have the chance. Deal with the sin before it deals with you. Also, I would encourage you to share this article with someone you know who is backslidden and not living for the Lord.

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