

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

A monarch butterfly is shown in the process of emerging from its chrysalis. The butterfly is positioned in the lower half of the frame, with its wings spread, displaying the characteristic orange and black pattern. The chrysalis is attached to a brown branch above it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

## Navigating Life's Big Transitions

- ▶ Trust in Times of Transition
- ▶ Preparing for Marriage
- ▶ Singleness and Service for the Lord
- ▶ Preparing for Life's Final Transition

# FRONTLINE

Volume 33 • Number 3



## 16 SINGLENES AND SERVICE FOR THE LORD

*Ken Rathbun*

Let's examine in a balanced way what 1 Corinthians 7 has to say about single people and ministry.

## 24 FAILURES AREN'T FINISHED

*Gordon Dickson*

As you face the ultimate transition—from this life to the next—remember that failures aren't finished.



## 4 TRUST IN TIMES OF TRANSITION

*Paul and Alne Hartog*

We know from Scripture and recognize from experience that parenting is not painless.

## 6 LIVING WITH ADULT CHILDREN IN THE HOME

*Alan and Nancy Cole*

Our American culture has influenced many people to assume that eighteen-year-old young people should leave home.

## 10 PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

*Kevin Schaal*

A truly loving marriage takes work, both before and after the "I do."

## 12 CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

*Kevin Schaal*

## 13 MINISTRY AS ONE

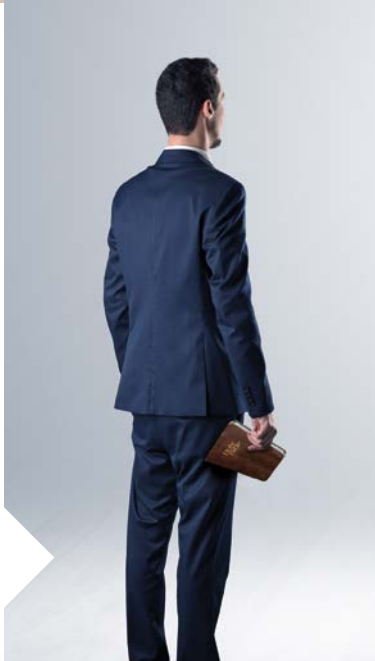
*Karis Cole*

Many single women struggle to understand their place in the church, and churches can struggle to know what to do with singles.

## 14 SINGLE AND READY TO ... MINISTER?

*Charlie Carter*

Should churches broaden their scope of pastoral search to include single men?

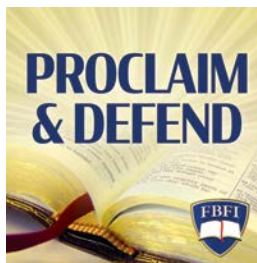


## 26 PREPARING FOR LIFE'S FINAL TRANSITION

*Douglas Brown*

End-of-life care can be very complicated.

Our sincere thanks to Dr. Ken Rathbun for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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## DEPARTMENTS

### 20 MAILBAG

### 22 ON THE HOME FRONT

### 22 NEWS FROM ALL OVER

### 28 HEART TO HEART

At Home in God's Grace  
*Linda Craven*

### 30 AT A GLANCE

Genesis: The Story Begins  
*Layton Talbert*

### 32 WITH THE WORD TO THE WORLD

Eight Hindrances to Answered Prayer  
(Conclusion)  
*Jim Tillotson*

### 34 REGIONAL REPORT

### 36 CHAPLAIN'S REPORT

Report from the Streets  
*Mike Ascher*

### 39 EVANGELIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Spiritual Desires for God's People  
*Jerry Sivnksty*

# Navigating Life's Big Transitions

In this issue we are exploring the life transitions that everyone faces. Managing those transitions can be tricky, to say the least.

There is much one could say about raising youngsters—and my wife and I face that every day as we try to raise our six- and nine-year-old children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” However, the focus of this issue is on the transitions in life that occur a bit later.

We begin with the transition of parenting college-age children and the widening responsibility and trust that that involves. Paul Hartog and his wife, Alne, are in the midst of that scenario and share with us lessons they have learned and are learning. Alan Cole and his wife, Nancy, share the delights and blessings that come from their experiences of living and growing with their adult children in their home.

Kevin Schaal provides a practical and heartfelt article designed to help single adults take a sober and penetrating look at their own hopes and dreams for marriage. Kevin offers a realistic and reasonable series of steps that can guide expectations in this pursuit. Unpleasant as self-examination is, to avoid the pitfalls in marriage that so many in our culture today fall into, Kevin's advice is not to be missed. He also provides a practical checklist in preparing for marriage.

As we looked at transitions further along in life, it quickly became apparent that living as a single person is a significant and worthy area to explore. This is especially true regarding ministry. The challenge is that singleness

may be a transitional phase, or it may not be. Either way can be rewarding and fulfilling. As the articles in this section indicate, singleness can be an amazing opportunity to serve our Savior. Karis Cole (a niece of Alan and Nancy) sets forth the interconnectedness in the local church that single women can enjoy by serving and being ministered to by others in the congregation. Charlie Carter explores the validity of the idea of single pastors (a role in which both he and I have served). My own article develops the apostle Paul's thoughts on the advantages of being single while in service for the Lord.

Gordon Dickson reminds us that no believer need to wallow in the regret of past failures. If we are breathing, there still is hope for contributing to a purpose that brings glory to God.

Finally, there is the greatest transition of all: to glory in the presence of God. Doug Brown explains the joys and challenges of helping parents with their own transitions of life. Doug and his wife had her parents live in their home for an extended period before they were promoted to glory. Doug is also currently helping his own parents transition to full-time care to meet the needs they have. His perspective and wisdom are very much worth listening to, both for older parents and for those who provide care for them.

There are more transitions in life than we examine here, but I hope what you glean from this issue will be helpful and profitable as you face the transitions God has for you.

Ken Rathbun





# Trust in Times of Transition

**W**hat do Hannah, Jochebed, and Mary have in common? Yes, they were all mothers. What else? They are all examples of releasing their children to the Lord. Hannah released her toddler son, Samuel, to serve in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 1). Jochebed had her baby, Moses, released into the Nile River and to God's providence (Exod. 2). Mary stood near the Roman cross as her adult son, Jesus, suffered an agonizing death for the sins of humanity (John 19). As parents, their stories touch and teach us. We know from Scripture and recognize from experience that parenting is not painless, but God remains faithful amid life transitions.

## FROM ALNE: A LOVING PARENT IS OPEN TO HEARTACHE

September 18, 2001. This date will forever be etched in my mind. Due to my extremely high blood pressure, my physi-

cians had forbidden me from following the news of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The entire nation had been turned upside down, and I remained isolated in my hospital room due to my preeclampsia. Seven days after September 11, I gave birth to Ethan six weeks prematurely through induced labor. I don't recall the physical pain of Ethan being born but rather the joy of new life combined with a numbing emptiness in my arms. Due to the medical care that Ethan required as a "preemie," he was whisked away to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with an oxygen mask on his tiny face—before I could even hold him.

The day finally came when I was well enough to be released from the hospital. But Ethan required further care. I remember sobbing as I said my goodbye to our firstborn blessing, who was cocooned safely inside his incubator. Though I was able to visit the hospital each day, the ache of being apart from him tore my

heart. Days turned into weeks. Just shy of a month, Ethan was finally able to come home. Oh, how we praised the Lord when our prayers were answered!

Unbeknownst to me at the time, God was already preparing me for the numerous "letting go's" of parenting, leading up to sending him off to college in the fall of 2020. Everything I felt when he was born came flooding back! Once again, I experienced the mixture of emotions—the joy of seeing our young, handsome eighteen-year-old boy soar into adulthood was combined with a numbing emptiness as I ached to hold onto him forever. My maternal heart was torn when I saw all his meager earthly goods gathered by the door. As I tearfully hugged him, saying goodbye on the patio, I kept thinking, "This is it! Nothing will ever be the same. Did I prepare him well enough to be on his own? Will he remember to put the lid back on the toothpaste? Will he make good and godly friends?"

## FROM PAUL: ENJOYING THE JOURNEY

This would not be our last release of a child into the passage of adulthood. Ethan, our first “boy blessing” born amidst medical emergency, is now a junior in college, healthy both in mind and body. Stacia, our eighteen-year-old “girl blessing,” is a lovely young lady and a thriving freshman in college. Isaiah, our fourteen-year-old, is an energetic freshman in high school, just a few years from the same journey.

Change is hard. On the other hand, the purpose of training children is not to keep them at home forever. They are to be sharpened arrows, launched into the fray. An athlete doesn't merely want to practice endlessly: he wants to get into the game. Education is not meant merely to fill our minds but to prepare us for real-world application. Children transforming into adults is a time of emotional heartache but also a time of excitement and anticipation. This time of launching into adulthood is part and parcel of the blueprint of parenting.

Over Christmas break with our two oldest home from college, we gaze at our family spread out in the living room. Some are enduring watching *Anne of Green Gables* at their mother's nostalgic request. One is putting together a thousand-piece puzzle. Another is reviewing language vocabulary, keeping fresh for the upcoming spring semester. My sweetheart and I glance at each other, and we sigh contentedly. All of us are together again. But we also feel a little melancholy, knowing that our family dynamics will soon be changing again as the holidays end. We will miss the morning greetings and the end-of-day “goodnight” kisses. We will miss the chatter around the dinner table, the perpetual sounds from the piano, the laughing and bantering throughout the day, having family devotions with everyone present—in sum, a house full of noise on a daily basis. (One of us does not do well with quiet!)

We often hear parents of adult children query, “Where did all the time go?” My sweetheart and I know we can't stop the forward march of time. All we can do is enjoy the ride, while trusting in God's sovereignty (James 1:2–5). Parents nurture their children and watch them grow. But the end goal is to lead them toward the

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exit door and to let them walk away, with our instructions (hopefully) stored in their heads and hearts. We as parents step back from years of training and allow them to forge their own paths, using the tools of training we have handed over to them. Direct oversight shifts into constrained input and influence.

### WHAT NOT TO DO

The departure of children from the parental nurture of home takes various forms—going to college, moving out, getting married. But some general principles remain helpful in common application. First, we should avoid some unwise “things not to do.”

**Live in regret.** You may wish you had spent more time with your children or been more regular in family devotions throughout their lives, or . . . But you can't change the past. As fitting, confess your sins to God (1 John 1:9), and ask for forgiveness from your children. And move on to what *can* be changed—the future.

**Ignore your children.** Sometimes, in an attempt to let our children sense that we respect their transition to independence, we are tempted to ignore them. But they still need us, even if in different ways. Don't abdicate your role as parent, even though the role looks different now.

**Control your children.** In your attempt to ensure that they don't make bad decisions, you may want to control their lives. Don't. Your children have been temporarily placed in your home as a stewardship from God. God is the One who is ultimately, sovereignly in control (Prov. 19:21; James 4:15).

**Pine away.** The emotional difficulty of adult children leaving the home—the empty bedroom, the quiet living room, the depleted dining table—is real, but God is present at this time, in this moment (Ps. 46:1).

**Worry.** As children leave the home, our minds may zip along a thousand roads of worry. But needless energy is spent upon such worry. Worry can't change the outcome (Matt. 6:25–34). And we don't know the future—sometimes children need to learn tough life lessons. Don't steal the struggle.

**Neglect other family members.** You are not the only one facing the new household dynamic. Your spouse is aching too. Siblings are navigating the waters of change as well.

**Expect perfection.** Neither college, marriage, nor a new job will “fix” underlying issues or effect instant maturity. God, through His Spirit, is the Lord of true transformation (2 Cor. 3:17–18). Your children, like you, are still a work in progress. Be patient.

### WHAT TO DO

On the other hand, there are things we can and should be doing.

**Keep praying.** My sweetheart and I have prayed for our three blessings since they were born. Times of transition only intensify the intercession (Phil. 4:6–7).

**Enjoy the adventure.** Encourage them where they are now in life. Seek updates, show interest in their activities, welcome their friends.

**Encourage your spouse.** Mama grief may manifest itself differently than Dad grief.

Continued on page 20

# Living with Adult Children in the Home

**O**ur American culture has influenced many people to think that eighteen-year-old young people should leave home and go either to college or get a job that will enable them to move out of the house. Not all cultures follow this thinking, and this has not always been the practice in our country.

Picture this: Dad and Mom bring a sweet little baby home from the hospital and begin the process of parenting. The parents *ooh* and *ahh* over each milestone the little one conquers and even do a little bragging. Before they know it, the little one begins school and learns many things, conquering more milestones. While these days of parenting are both rewarding and exhausting, the parents keep working with this child through all the growing-up

times. Then the day comes to watch the child take off for college, and the parents send the young adult off with pride and tears. Sometimes the young adult leaves home to go to college, and sometimes he or she chooses a college close by or opts to stay home. Regardless of the school situation, the young adult is moving forward toward complete independence. So far so good.

Becoming adults happens in stages. Our sons began working jobs in high school and began the process of juggling school and work and saving for the future. Once they became drivers, they began contributing for car insurance and both purchased their own cars. The older they became, the more responsibility they took on for taking care of their own needs. They continue to work toward a future on their own.





## THE COLLEGE YEARS AND BEYOND

When our older son finished high school, we encouraged (okay, maybe we insisted!) him to live in the dorms for at least one year even though the college was seven minutes from home. (Yes, we timed the distance!) He was ready for the adventure. He had saved his money to pay his portion of the bill, and we thought it would be good for him. It was. He enjoyed living in the dorms and made good friends there. Our second son asked to stay at home for his college years. We had moved closer to the college, a four-minute drive, and he now had his own bedroom and his own car. Since he was very sociable and we lived close by, we agreed. This situation has worked well, and he has invited his friends to our home frequently.

Many people have adult children who choose to stay at home longer or ask to come back for a variety of reasons, many times financial ones. When our older son graduated from college, he asked if he could move back in with us, and we agreed. He soon found full-time work but was still puzzled about what would be his life's work. Over time he made the decision to go back to school for more specific training, and that has led to a job change that fits with his training. Our younger son is still in college and is also at home.

## FAMILY TRADITIONS

First of all, we are a family of four that values our togetherness. We have developed a number of traditions, especially during the holidays and birthdays, and throughout the years we have sought to maintain these traditions. Our Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are filled with togetherness and family fun that make these times of year extra special.

When our sons were younger, we took them with us when we ministered in churches. Now that they are older, they remain at home when we are gone. They want to be a part of our local church and have their own opportunities to serve there. Our sons have adapted well to being a part of a family in vocational ministry. They have traveled with us when we went to Brazil on a mission trip, have gone on their own mission trips, and are very supportive of our ministry at Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa. We often have college students in our home, and our sons are very receptive and helpful with this ministry. We have had students as well as missionaries live with us for extended periods, and our sons have embraced the ministry of hospitality.

We have the advantage of all attending the same church, and we attempt to make Sunday a special day by eating dinner together. Throughout the week, we try to end days with prayer and family time in the Word. Individual schedules make this more difficult, but we enjoy the times we have.

We also travel together, and while traveling we are careful to be together and do things together but also allow for alone time and input from each other. Even as we travel in the car, we have devotions together and read fun books. In this age of modern conveniences, it can become easy for a family to be together in the same room but separated by various computer links and games—some of that happens too. We have realized we need to cook together, clean together, and play games together. On our last vacation, we came to the end of the week and needed to do some laundry. Instead of Nancy tackling this job alone, we all pitched in to accomplish the task. While the clothes were washing and drying, we sat at a table and played Rook, and this

simple event has become a fond memory. (By the way, we came from behind to win that game of Rook, but barely!)

We minister to one another when illness strikes. Just as we have cared for our sons, they have in turn found ways to help us when we are not well.

## SINNERS UNDER THE SAME ROOF

We are sinners saved by grace. This article is not a reflection of perfect parents living in a perfect home with perfect adult sons who always do everything perfectly. The reality is that we sin against one another, and we ask each other for forgiveness. We do have, however, respect for each other. We attempt to support one another and limit ourselves for the sake of each other. This article is not a diagram of exactly what to do or advice that must be followed to the letter. Instead, we would like to describe what we do as a family of adults and make some suggestions to promote reflection on your part.

Being purposeful in relationships is very important, especially in your own family unit.

- 1. Keep a good relationship with each other by talking, laughing, and doing things together.**
- 2. Redeem your time together.** Enjoy the moments you have together because you do not know when your adult children will be ready to strike out on their own. Much can change in just one year.
- 3. Seek to impart wisdom to your adult children.** Pass on generational lessons that your parents passed on to you. Pass on the lessons that they need to hear as adults and listen to your children's insight. I (Alan) can remember my father sharing words of wisdom with me during my adult years. We attempt to share with our sons some of our advice to them. Discipline will look different with adult children. The discipline should be coming along side of them to provide counsel and suggestions. Instead of being their commander, you should be their advisor and cheerleader.
- 4. Keep your arms wide open to them.** Let your children know that your home is a haven and that they are always welcome.
- 5. Trust your children to make wise decisions.** When things go wrong in their

**WE MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER WHEN ILLNESS STRIKES. JUST AS WE HAVE CARED FOR OUR SONS, THEY HAVE IN TURN FOUND WAYS TO HELP US WHEN WE ARE NOT WELL.**

lives, avoid saying to them, “I told you so.” Instead, spend time together praying about the situation and talking about it. We have practiced casting our cares on the Lord (1 Pet.5:7) and watched God work circumstances out for good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

**6. Let each other know when you will be late.** This practice is a consideration for one another. We have had our sons call us to check on our travel plans. On one occasion when we were returning from a Sunday’s ministry, our younger son called to warn us of bad weather. We found the information helpful.

**7. Be interested in their dreams.** Be honest with your thoughts regarding their dreams and passions for the future. Their dreams may be good but may involve a process of steps that need to be planned out.

**8. Assist them as they navigate the pathway of singleness and independence.** Do not assume that living at home with you is their dream. Do not assume that just because they have not mentioned a problem or struggle in their lives that everything is fine. The hardship may be so deep that they find addressing it with you is too

difficult. Be comfortable allowing them to express these thoughts to others, and be thankful for these people.

**9. Tell them what they need to hear and not what they want to hear.** There are times when this is the best thing you as a parent can do for them. Ephesians 4:15 reminds us to be “speaking the truth in love.” We need to be truthful in what we say, but we need to be loving in how we say it. We need to keep their best interests in mind and point them to prayer for God’s will.

**10. Ask your adult children to help out around the house and yard.** Also, have them contribute financially. This responsibility helps prepare them to be on their own.

We have friends and family who have had adult children living with them, and they also have had good relationships with their children. One friend spoke of living with her grandparents for a while and what a blessing it was. She even referred to this as showing hospitality to your children. Another blessing is that our adult sons have had the opportunity to become friends and not just brothers. They are learning to appreciate each other’s

strengths and help each other with their weaknesses.

Make home a haven. Eat together; laugh together; talk together. Tell each other thank you. Grow together spiritually. Pray together and pray for one another. Support one another.

### POSTSCRIPT

Some of you may be in living situations that are not going well. You may need to speak with your adult children and rethink how the situation is working. If that does not bring good results, you may have to ask for help. Give your situation to the Lord and work toward having a God-glorifying relationship. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt.7:7).

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# Preparing for Marriage

**L**ife is not a Disney movie, and courtship and marriage surely are not. We have raised our children in a fantasy world of “love at first sight” and foolish romanticism. That is not to say that love and marriage should not be a wonderful experience—even “romantic,” in the word’s most noble sense. But the shallow version of romance portrayed in movies, TV, and novels is unrealistic and unbiblical.

A truly loving marriage takes work, both before and after the “I do.” Some of the most important work takes place long before the potential spouse is even in the picture. Christians and Christian families need to be more deliberate about this process.

## BEFORE THE LOOKING STARTS

*The Negotiable and Nonnegotiable List.* Every unmarried person, younger or older, should lay the ground rules for the qualifications of a future spouse long before he or she meets someone. I ask all of our Christian high school seniors to write out such a list as part of their Bible class. It is pretty simple. The nonnegotiables are

a list of characteristics they are looking for in a future spouse that are absolutely inflexible. If they cannot find a person with these characteristics who is willing to marry them, then they will remain single. Of course, a clear testimony of salvation, a Christian walk, doctrinal agreement, and many other important things are usually on this list.

It is interesting that the young men tend to keep this list short—sometimes too short—while the girls tend to have very high expectations of what they want in a future mate, sometimes focusing on less important characteristics, such as height and age.

The negotiable things are preferences and are usually listed in order of priority. They can include interests, hobbies, personality traits, and even some more important things that might not be deal breakers, such as family background and experiences prior to salvation.

It is important to make this list before courting. It is way too easy to tailor the list to fit a particular person once you have become emotionally attached.

Once we have these lists in hand, we talk about them. Getting godly counsel on such a list is essential. Even the most experienced Christians can have big blind spots in their expectations of a future spouse.

It is about this time that I ask this question: “Why in the world would this wonderful, ideal, person, you describe want to marry someone like you?” Many young people (but even middle-aged adults) seem much more interested in what their future spouse will be like than in preparing themselves to be the type of husband or wife that God wants them to be.

Parents of teenagers and young adults should participate in this process. How well prepared is your child for marriage and what are you doing to get them ready? This is part of your parenting job. I have included a checklist that can help parents and people prepare to get to where they need to be. (See p. 12.)

## I FOUND SOMEONE—IS THIS THE ONE?

That’s the wrong question. “Is this the type of person that I should marry?” is the right question.





The dating process in our culture over the last one hundred years does not have a good record for producing godly marriages. Even if the couple avoids the trap of premarital sex and sexually related activity, they tend to develop emotional attachments far too early and do not spend appropriate time actually getting to know one another.

The arranged marriages of other cultures—when godly and caring parents are involved—even seem to work better than the dating practices of the past. I am not advocating for arranged marriages, of course. However, godly parents with biblical wisdom often do a very commendable job of picking out an appropriate spouse for their child. Modern dating sites, now so popular in the US, which match people up on the basis of an extensive questionnaire based upon personality traits, values, likes, and dislikes, fill a similar role. It is interesting that people that would be horrified to include godly parents in the decision-making process will gladly follow the recommendations of a computer algorithm.

So “Is this the *type* of person I should marry?” should come before “Is this the

*person* that I should marry?” It is really hard to know this without getting to know that person well. Once you meet someone, getting to know him or her is the next priority. Often couples jump right into a premature deepening emotional commitment phase. Don’t fall in love with a person you do not know. Find out what each of you believes about nearly everything. This includes areas of theology, politics, music, arts, entertainment, and more. John Piper has published a helpful tool for this online.

See the sidebar for additional questions that definitely ought to be matters of discussion before the engagement.

#### **AFTER THE RING**

So now you are engaged. Every couple should get premarital counseling. Proper premarital counseling forces conversations that are foundational to a good marriage.

Good premarital counseling should include the following:

*An explanation and discussion about the biblical roles of a husband and wife.* The counselor should secure a commitment from both counselees to submit themselves to these biblical mandates. This discussion should extend the idea of biblical roles to job descriptions and expectations in the home. This discussion should even deal with the most mundane things of life such as who will take out the trash, wash the dishes, and do the shopping. These are not all biblically defined roles, but people coming into a marriage relationship often have very different views on what husbands’ and wives’ job descriptions look like in the home.

*A discussion about “leaving father and mother.”* How will parents, siblings, and extended family members impact this

**HOW WELL PREPARED IS YOUR CHILD FOR MARRIAGE AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO GET THEM READY? THIS IS PART OF YOUR PARENTING JOB.**

coming marriage? What are the potential problems and what should be the solutions? This is a time to get very specific and not speak in generalities. If Mom or Dad is going to be a problem, it is time to talk about it now.

*A financial plan.* Every couple needs instruction on a biblical attitude toward money, debt, and financial choices. They need to make a budget and be realistic about their personal finances. The couple must reveal all previously undisclosed financial matters, including debts, foreclosures, and bankruptcies.

*All personal issues that might affect the marriage must be addressed.* These would include previous sexual and romantic experiences, mental and emotional issues, health problems, a criminal background, and more. Get the surprises out of the way now.

*The biblical principles of the sexual relationship in marriage.* As sexually “open” as our society is, the porn industry has turned many young people—especially men—into sexual morons. Most Christian young men entering marriage today have at least been exposed to pornography at some time. The Bible has a lot to say about the beauty and responsibilities of the sexual relationship that God created. There are some very good books available on this subject, and these issues must be discussed plainly.

Premarital counseling should also address the subject of children, parenting plans, philosophy of discipline, and even fears and bad experiences.

Parents, pastors, and counselors must help prepare people for marriage long before the challenge to the bride and groom on the wedding day. However, the real responsibility rests with that single person who is praying for God to send a life partner along. What are you doing to prepare yourself? Maybe God is waiting on you.

**Dr. Kevin Schaal** serves as president of FBFI. He pastors Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona.



\* <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/questions-to-ask-when-preparing-for-marriage>

## CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

*PLEASE NOTE:* This list is not intended to be exhaustive!



### PERSONAL SPIRITUAL LIFE

- Personal surrender to God, including being surrendered to God in personal habits and attitudes toward finances.
- Contentment with being single, if that is God's will.
- Willingness to do God's will as a lifetime vocation.
- General contentment, not always complaining or wanting something more.
- Understanding the necessity of a daily walk with God—and being faithful in a daily devotional prayer time.
- Holiness in daily living with personal standards growing out of that holiness.
- Ability to defend what one believes.
- Faithfully keeping personal standards even when not supervised.



### PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Basic personal hygiene and dress skills, which show respect for God and others.
- An understanding of the biblical roles of a husband and a wife and a willingness to fill that role appropriately.
- A demonstration of proper stewardship of one's health through a reasonable approach to nutrition, exercise, medical care, and physical maintenance.
- Adherence to basic etiquette. (Get a book on manners and review it.)
- Demonstrates kindness and respect when dealing with others (parents, siblings, friends, relatives, coworkers, strangers).
- Communicates willingly, appropriately, and effectively.
- Is patient and forgiving.
- Exudes confidence appropriately.
- Takes criticism well. When faced with helpful criticism, does not get angry, offended, cry, ignore, make excuses, etc.
- Humility, a teachable spirit.



### FINANCES AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS

- Understands basic domestic finance: basic costs of living, budget planning, etc.
- Has a financial plan for life: giving, saving, debt, house purchase, etc.
- Can perform basic financial functions: balance a checkbook, keep a savings account, pay bills, etc.
- Has a life skill, vocation, or is in the process of developing such.
- Has worked, held a job, and been a good steward of the resources received.



### DOMESTIC SKILLS\*

- Yard work—knows how to maintain a lawn or garden.
- Handyman skills, basic auto skills; can fix relatively minor problems in the home and car (replacing doorknobs, fixing toilets, unclogging sinks, changing a tire, changing the car's oil, familiarity with the basic parts of a vehicle, the ability to monitor maintenance schedules, etc.
- Basic household upkeep, such as dusting, vacuuming, cleaning, etc.
- Basic computer skills.
- Clothing care (washing, ironing, stain removal, basic repair and sewing).
- Cooking and menu planning.
- Home decorating and care.
- Basic childcare skills
- Keeps personal space neat and clean without parental prompting or inspection.

\* Although we may often consider some of these roles “male” roles and some of them “female” roles, in reality all people should have at least a basic familiarity with each of these.



# Ministry as One

**B**elief that ministering as a single woman glorifies God demonstrates trust in His design and plans, even though some aspects of her role in the local church may be unclear. Many single women struggle to understand their place in the church, and churches can struggle to know what to do with singles in general. Whether single, married, or widowed, saved individuals should involve themselves in ministry in obedience to basic commands in Scripture. How can single women involve themselves in ministry? Let's look at several biblical principles and then at some practical applications for singles in the local church.

## GOD'S PLAN: THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local church is God's main plan for relationships and discipleship today. Within the church the Holy Spirit enables us to serve others. Galatians 6:9–10 encourages believers not to give up serving but to do good, and especially to those of the household of faith, the church.

*Many singles pursue godliness and center their lives on living for God in ways that qualify them as resources in the church.* Many members make up the body of Christ in a local church (Rom. 12:4–8), and each one holds value in God's eyes. Sometimes people in the church seem not to appreciate or value the single woman's thoughts, ideas, or expertise. Some believe that single women have no experience or understanding to offer—yet Scripture sufficiently provides all teaching needed for everyone to live righteously and apply wisdom. Serving amidst dominating personalities or unbiblical restraints may challenge us, but we are called to pursue peace. Several single women I know have pursued

additional training in God's Word to better meet the teaching and discipleship needs in their churches and to give them the tools they need to lead Bible studies with unsaved women.

*A single woman ought to willingly minister alone, praying for and seeking opportunities to minister within her church.* Sometimes a reticent heart toward ministering needs correcting. Single women often hesitate, even refuse, ministry opportunities because they may have to serve alone rather than alongside a husband. However, singleness allows me a measure of flexibility that God calls me to use for the sake of others. I believe it's important for singles to build relationships with

whole families whenever possible rather than remaining only in the company of other singles. Many times I've changed my schedule to travel a distance to serve close friends in need. I've received late-night emergency phone calls and left my home immediately to watch children for families while the parents go to a hospital; I've also driven people to the hospital and remained there with them. Visiting housebound church members, those in a care facility, or ones who simply need encouragement often encourages them as well as me. I minister by being present in people's lives, often not having to say much at all, but living out Christ's model to aid others no matter the hour or occasion.



Continued on page 29

# Single and Ready to . . . Minister?

## Should a Church Consider Hiring a Single Pastor?



Churches seeking to hire a new pastor usually have a type of person they are looking for, and, typically, a church or search committee prefers to look for pastoral candidates who are married. The reasons a married man would be desirable for a church are straightforward:

- A married man will have more life experience than a single man.
- The pastor's wife will be able to serve in the life of the church along with her husband.
- A married couple has the potential to have—or may already have—children, and a young family will help attract other young families, etc.

It is easy to see why most churches, when they are searching for a pastoral candidate, naturally narrow their scope to men who are married.

However, should churches broaden their scope of pastoral search to include single men? Another way to ask this question would be, “Is there a reason a church should *not* hire a single pastor?” The aim of this article is to examine a few biblical points of data, mainly 1 Timothy 3:1–7, to see if there are exegetical reasons for a church or search committee *not* to pursue a single man as a pastoral candidate.

Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding pastoral qualifications, found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, does mention the marital status of a pastoral candidate. The phrase “the husband of one wife” is the second quality mentioned in the list of pastoral qualifications. If this phrase

means a pastor *must* be married, we have a simple answer to our initial question. However, many scholars understand this phrase not to *require* marriage.

What does “the husband of one wife” mean? What did Paul intend this qualification to entail for a pastoral candidate? This phrase is three words in the original language and translates directly to “one-woman man.” Much has been written on the interpretation of “one-woman man” and its relation to widows, remarriage and/or divorce, and polygamy in the early church. Here is a survey of four common views of this phrase and its meaning.

### MARRIAGE ESSENTIAL?

One common view is that this phrase *requires marriage* for one who holds the office of pastor. If this is the correct understanding, a church should *never* pursue a single pastoral candidate; a single candidate could never meet the requirement.

We have a handful of good reasons to discard this understanding. First, an almost identical phrase is used later in this epistle regarding widows (1 Tim. 5:9), and that phrase, “a one-man woman,” certainly does not mean that a widow is required to have been married to be an eligible widow. If “one-man woman” means “previously married,” the phrase is incredibly redundant. The term “widow” properly limits the scope to women whose husbands have died. It is unlikely that Paul uses the phrase “one-man woman” as a second means of defining what a widow is.

Second, this interpretation presents some logical issues later in the passage. If we interpret “one-woman man” in a rigid



way, then the pastor probably also *must* have children according to verse 4. Third, it would be odd for Paul to make a stipulation for pastors that he (and Timothy) did not meet. Fourth, and lastly, if Paul was requiring pastors to be married in this passage, it seems divergent from his ideas of singleness (which are quite positive) in other passages.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT DOES “THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE” MEAN? WHAT DID PAUL INTEND THIS QUALIFICATION TO ENTAIL FOR A PASTORAL CANDIDATE?

### POLYGAMY PROHIBITED?

Another common interpretation is that Paul’s intention here is to restrict those pursuing the pastoral office from polygamy. Commentators have differing opinions on this interpretation, some stating that this would not have been a significant enough issue in the Ephesian church (where Timothy was located) for Paul to address it specifically. Early Church Father John Chrysostom held this view, and John Calvin agreed with his interpretation.

### DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE FORBIDDEN?

A third common interpretation, or related discussion, is that this passage

could be prohibiting divorced and/or remarried individuals from pastoral office. One commentator states, “The final interpretation, which does give full emphasis to the word ‘*mia*,’ ‘one,’ is that an overseer can only have been married once. This was the position of the early church.”<sup>3</sup> This would also align with the early church’s position that celibacy/singleness was virtuous. The second and third interpretations presented here have many hybrid views, especially in the parsing out of issues surrounding divorce and remarriage.

### FAITHFULNESS REQUIRED

Finally, the view that I believe is correct, is that Paul intends to communicate marital or sexual faithfulness. The reference in 1 Timothy 5:9 to widows as “one-man women” helps build an understanding of how Paul is employing the phrase in 1 Timothy 3:2. Widows *worthy* of support would meet two criteria: (1) they were faithful to their previous marriage and (2) not remarried. The interpretation that these phrases refer to exemplary character regarding sexual ethics fits both contexts well.<sup>4</sup>

A single pastoral candidate could demonstrate this same exemplary character without having experienced the marital or parental proving grounds. Much like Paul or Timothy, a single pastor can devote himself to ministry tasks with a freedom that a husband and father might not (1 Cor. 7:32–35). The case could be made that a single pastoral candidate, who meets the other qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3, might be more desirable than a married candidate. Ultimately,

that decision and preference is up to each individual church and search committee. However, there is no exegetical support in 1 Timothy 3 to restrict a church from seeking a single pastor.

With these ideas in mind, churches and search committees should consider single pastoral candidates. A church or search committee would have a few more ways to test the quality of a married candidate. On this basis, a husband or father seeking the pastoral role might be preferred compared to a single candidate. This, however, should not bar a man from consideration. If a single pastoral candidate truly meets the character requirements of the pastoral office, he should not be overlooked on the basis of his marital status.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar list of pastoral qualifications is in Titus 1:6–9, and the phrase we will examine below (“the husband of one wife”) is also listed there.

<sup>2</sup> Mounce, William, “Pastoral Epistles,” *Word Biblical Commentary* (Zondervan, 2015), 170–71. Mounce provides a robust and simplified conversation.

<sup>3</sup> Mounce, W. D., *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, 2000), 172.

<sup>4</sup> Fee, Gordon D., *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2011), 80–81. Fee provides one of the most succinct and helpful commentaries on this passage.

# Singleness and Se

**M**y purpose in this article is to examine in a balanced way what 1 Corinthians 7 has to say about single people and ministry. The key word in the previous sentence is “balanced.” I also think it is helpful for you to know how my life experiences inform the way I think about this passage, particularly as it deals with one’s status (especially marital) in life and ministry.

Full disclosure: I spent nearly thirty-nine years as a single person, and now I have spent not quite fourteen years married. In my adult life I have been involved in service at the local churches in which I held membership. I have also served the Lord in full-time ministry as a single person and as a married person; both in the pastorate and as a Baptist Mid-Missions missionary. In all honesty, I do not consider myself to have succeeded often enough spiritually in my life as a single, and neither have I done so as a married person. To each status, I have brought my own selfish desire and sinful nature. I am just so grateful for God’s grace to me and the forgiving nature of the woman I married. She has often had opportunity to exercise it and has done so without limitations.

Getting back to our topic, I have heard a number of sermons preached on 1 Corinthians 7 and ministry. Candor compels me to say that in some cases it seemed to me a proper balance with Paul’s

main points was lacking. I think the natural tendency is that whatever preachers say about the passage, they do not want to disparage the institution of marriage. To my mind, this (good) intention can result in a diminishing of Paul’s emphasis on singleness and ministry.

In this article I want to examine briefly the greater context of chapter 7 within the book of 1 Corinthians, the various topics Paul discusses in chapter 7, and the specific verses in chapter 7 that speak to singleness and ministry. Finally, I will draw some implications and applications from Paul’s teaching on singleness and ministry.

## THE WIDER CONTEXT

Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians must have been a challenge. Here was a church he had helped establish, but later on he learned the church had substantial difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Paul addressed divisions in the church (chs. 1–4).

- moral problems (ch. 5).
- legal action taken against other believers (ch. 6).
- meat offered to idols and the liberty to restrict oneself for the sake of other believers (chs. 8–10).
- worship in the church, including the practice of the Lord’s Supper and the use of spiritual gifts (chs. 11–14).

- the supreme importance of the resurrection of Christ (ch. 15).

These problems were hindering this church’s effectiveness in ministry and the believers’ spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER 7

Narrowing our focus to chapter 7 and marriage issues and applications, I find several transition statements that show me Paul had several subpoints to address regarding this topic (vv. 1, 10, 25). Paul provided some specific teachings on marriage (vv. 1–9). He mentions that it is fine to stay unmarried (v. 1; see also vv. 7–8), but it is also proper to get married (v. 2; see also v. 9). If a couple does marry, they should give themselves completely to each other (vv. 3–6).

In the next section Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, discusses the permanence of marriage not mentioned by Christ in the Gospels (v. 10, 12). He particularly deals with the situation of a believer married to an unbeliever (vv. 12–15) with the hope that the testimony of the former will result in the salvation of the latter (v. 16).

It is in verse 17 that Paul exhorts his readers to be content with and remain in the status of life in which they find themselves. He states this is his standard exhortation in all the churches. Paul even repeats this principle several more times (vv. 20, 24, and even in v. 26). Though Paul





# Service for the Lord

is clearly focused within the context of marriage, he applies it first to whether one is circumcised or not (vv. 18–19). Often it is easier to understand a principle if it is applied in multiple applications.

Paul's next application is to servants (vv. 21–23). Yet he adds another idea this time. If you can gain your freedom, do so. Why? So you can devote yourself more fully to Christ, whatever your calling is. Either way, we are to serve Christ.

In verse 25 Paul, still moved by the Spirit's leading, discusses other issues that Christ did not fully address in the Gospels. He continues with the principle he had mentioned in verses 17, 20, and 24—stay in the condition in which God called you. Paul now applies the “remain as you are” principle to marriage, and he has a lot to say about it, both to males and females.

Paul makes this judgment for three reasons.<sup>2</sup> First, because of the current “distress” (vv. 26–27), possibly persecution. This is

a good time to remember the immediate context of the city of Corinth. The people in the first century knew well the city's reputation for immorality, especially with the temple prostitution in their worship practices. Whether that was in Paul's mind is not clear to me. Paul is clear that whether you marry or not, both decisions are reasonable. Nevertheless, he wanted to spare these couples trouble (v. 28).

Another reason to remain in the state you are in relation to marriage is that the time is coming for the Lord's return (vv. 29–31). Paul says it is prudent to live with eternity in view, to prioritize the spiritual above the temporal, since “the fashion of this world passeth away” (v. 31).

A third reason to avoid changing one's marital state relates closest to the theme of this article. You can serve the Lord better without distractions as a single person (vv. 32–35). This reality is clearly self-evident (to me, anyway). There are less earthly

distractions. Decisions a single person makes affect fewer people, and the single person can make them quickly. Naturally, and rightly so, people married to each other are deeply and completely concerned about each other. That reality is multiplied if/when children come along. Both my wife and I have experienced these contrasts clearly.

Paul provides strong evidence for the benefits of staying single while still affirming the appropriateness of marriage (vv. 36–38). However, his preference is still crystal clear: for the purpose of the present “distress,” the coming of the Lord, and the better opportunities for serving the Lord, singleness is better.

A curious question in this section is whether Paul is addressing fathers or betrothed men. However, neither option obscures the clear message Paul communicates to the Corinthian church or to us.

The apostle finishes his treatise on marriage and ministry by addressing the issue of widows and remarriage (vv. 39–40). Under Roman law, only a widowed woman would really have control of her life and finances. He is again clear on what he thinks is best: singleness.

## IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

1. Paul in no way denigrates marriage itself or says that those who decide to marry are spiritually inferior to those who do not (see vv. 9, 28, 36, and 39).

**HOWEVER, HIS PREFERENCE IS STILL CRYSTAL CLEAR: FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT “DISTRESS,” THE COMING OF THE LORD, AND THE BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVING THE LORD, SINGLENES IS BETTER.**

## MINISTRY AS A SINGLE CAN BE DONE IN A FULL-TIME CAPACITY, AND EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD CONSIDER THIS POSSIBILITY VERY SERIOUSLY, WHETHER MARRIED OR NOT.

- Paul recognizes key dynamics in marriage:
  - The necessity of committed spouses (vv. 33–34).
  - The desirability of permanence in marriage, even if one spouse is not a believer (vv. 12–13, 16; see also v. 27a [“seek not to be loosed”]).
  - Putting a male and female together in a marriage can be problematic, even if both are believers, because of our sinful natures (v. 28).<sup>3</sup>
- Remaining single as an adult or after the death of a spouse brings significant advantages in service for the Lord (v. 35). There are lots of benefits of being single. For instance, you can enjoy opportunities that no longer are options for married people, such as taking a mission trip to the other side of the world for an extended period. The opportunities are endless, and the people you meet while serving the Lord in another culture can become priceless friends. (I have experienced this often.)
- I see no restriction in this passage as to what types of ministry Paul has in mind for singles (maintaining the directives of 1 Tim. 2). That is, he is thinking in terms of the ministry he is actively involved in currently: itinerate preaching, pastoring, mentoring/discipleship, church planting, and other types of missionary work. The keys for readiness for ministry involve spiritual maturity (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1), not marital status. While there are rare exceptions, not many young men in their early twenties—married or not—are ready to pastor a church. (I certainly was not.)
- We ought to stay in the status God has for us while focusing our lives on our service to our Lord.

Ministry as a single can be done in a full-time capacity, and every Christian should consider this possibility very seriously, whether married or not. Many believers also serve in the context of their local church while pursuing other employment as a committed Christian. If God changes our status, fine! If He does not, stay faithful in your service to Him. In other words, you do not need to wait until you are married to serve the Lord.

Points 4 and 5 above are key points in this passage, and we would do well to give them the emphasis Paul does. Why? Because service for the Lord is wonderful, worthwhile, satisfying, and God-honoring. This passage does not contain all of Paul’s thoughts on marriage (see Eph. 5:22–33, for instance) and singleness and service for the Lord. However, what it does say is clear. We should proclaim that message with the clarity that Paul did.

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<sup>1</sup> For a chronology of Paul’s interactions with the church in Corinth, see “Contacts and Correspondence,” in David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 504–6.

<sup>2</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Vol. 2, 19.

<sup>3</sup> That is, building a strong marriage is not always easy. Neither is marriage a haven to escape other problems. It takes work to build a strong marriage. I know I have too often put my selfish desires ahead of the needs of my wife. To counter this natural tendency takes the supernatural control of the Holy Spirit.

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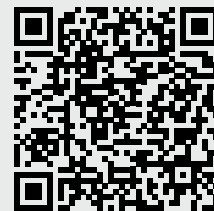


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## Mailbag

**W**e wanted to especially thank you for encouraging us to attend the FBFI South Regional Fellowship. What a blessing to spend that time with others who are serving faithfully. The week was well organized, and the sessions were excellent—no doubt a lot of hard work goes on behind the scenes to make it all possible. It was also a blessing to make several contacts and get exposure to our desire to serve the Lord in ministry. The Lord wanted us there, and He used you to encourage us.

*Jerry and Linda Craven  
Greenville, South Carolina*

**W**e have enjoyed *FrontLine* magazine for quite a few years after my brother John began sending us a guest membership. My wife and I were discussing the articles in this latest issue, and we are very impressed with the professionalism and timeliness of the articles. These godly views of current social issues deserve a wider audience. We are sharing these with our friends. It is such a blessing and a breath of fresh air to realize that men of character, honor, integrity, and well educated in the sciences are sharing their views addressing the issues of our culture. Thank you. Keep up the good work.

*Harold L. Vaughn  
Walton, Kentucky*

## Trust in Times of Transition

Continued from page 5

Communicate. Listen. Empathize with your spouse. Hold on to God and to each other tightly.

**Connect with others.** Stay involved and ministering in your local church. Seek out parents who have already gone through this journey (Prov. 15:22). Glean from their insights, triumphs, and missteps.

**Remain involved.** Your children still need tactful wisdom as they shoulder greater personal responsibility. Help set mutually-agreed-upon boundaries. Get to know their new friends and welcome them into your home.

**Be consistent in your love.** End phone conversations by reaffirming your love, not with a closing scold or badgering nag. Send birthday cards and care packages—or a \$5 bill for a snack or coffee drink. With all the changes happening in life, your child needs to sense the bedrock of parental love.

**Keep your home light on.** As they find their way back home, whether for the summer or the holidays, welcome them back with open arms.

**Trust God's promises.** He will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5-6). He is working all things together for your spiritual good and His ultimate glory (Rom. 8:28-29).

God's immutable character and His settled Word remain unchanging in the midst of all life-changes (Ps. 119:89-90). The Lord alone is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). And God loves your children even more than you do.

**Dr. Paul and Aine Hartog** enjoy being the parents of three young adults. Dr. Hartog is the program chair of Theological Studies at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary (Ankeny, Iowa) and an avid writer.



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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)*

### Do We Well To Relinquish Preaching?

There is a trend in evangelical churches towards discontinuing some of our traditional services. Both midweek prayer meetings and Lord’s Day evening preaching services are increasingly disappearing from church calendars. Their replacements are generally either activities (music rehearsals or youth and children’s ministries) or fellowships for spiritual purpose (Bible study and/or discussion of a spiritually helpful book).

All of these are commendable, and most of our churches already make use of them profitably. But I want to raise a critical question; one that all our churches are going to have to answer: *Do we well to relinquish our preaching services for these other kinds of ministries?* That is, are we wise to *replace* preaching with programs, fellowships, and small-group Bible studies?

My intention isn’t to reflect upon anyone making such changes. But surely all of us, even though we’re *independent* Baptists, must accept a certain amount of responsibility for the influence of our example upon other ministries. When a respected pastor changes what have been long-preserved practices, it catches the attention of sister churches. It isn’t long before they begin to wonder whether their own church isn’t missing something important. Soon their pastors are constrained to respond.

Each of us must consider our accountability for introducing changes which may have long-term effects upon the Church at large. Historical practices handed down to us at great cost by previous generations can be easily discarded in a milieu of constant innovation. But

future generations awakening to the need to recover them may be able to do so only with great difficulty. Christ’s Body is a single Church throughout all New Testament history. Each of our congregations bears a measure of responsibility to the whole, both present and future.

In light of this, I have a twofold burden. The first is to attempt to distinguish preaching from all other forms of communicating God’s Word. I want to make a scriptural case that preaching is substantially different from Sunday school teaching, group Bible study, catechizing, or lecturing. I want to show that it is scripturally distinguishable even from the instruction given by a spiritually gifted teacher to a small group fellowship or even to an entire church gathered for worship. I hope to show that to substitute any of these for preaching does not provide the people with an equivalent, no matter how effective it may be in its own right.

Second, I’d like to plead for not making these substitutions. I need to clarify yet again that the spiritual helpfulness of other ways of communicating Truth isn’t in question, at least to my mind. But what it seems ought to be carefully considered is the prudence of relinquishing to them any of the relatively few preaching services our churches hold each week.

#### SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ALL COMMUNICATIONS OF THE WORD

During the summers before and after my senior year of high school, friends back from various Bible colleges would lead Bible studies in homes, backyards, and occasionally on Saturday nights at a beach along Lake Erie. These were truly helpful at that stage in my spiritual growth. I look back on them with real gratitude. But if someone had suggested to me that

#### INSIDE

Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor’s study. . . . . V  
 Straight Cuts—An exegetical study . . . . . VI  
 Windows—Themed sermon illustrations . . . . . VII

over the long term, these kinds of fellowships might be even more beneficial than our Sunday night services at church, I'm pretty sure that even as a teenager I would've questioned that. But why? I think that it would probably have come down to the issue of the importance of preaching.

How would you yourself distinguish the preaching of God's Word from other ways of communicating it? From merely teaching it, for instance? Or from discussing it informally in a classroom or home Bible study?

Some highly respected men would answer that as far as they're concerned, there's actually very little difference, especially between teaching and preaching. In fact, when I was considering leaving full-time Bible teaching on the collegiate level to take a church and preach, an older, much-respected faculty member kindly attempted to dissuade me by arguing that teaching and preaching are pretty much the same thing.

Unquestionably, there are notable similarities between the two. These must be acknowledged and given their due weight, especially because they seem to argue for the reasonableness of not making too much of preaching.

To begin with, of course, the content is the same. It is God's Word that is being discussed, preached, or taught.

Second, the communication is live. By that I mean that there is a living someone who is speaking in person. People are listening to him in real time, not merely reading one of his books or even listening to one of his recordings.

Third, the person speaking may be spiritually gifted. This isn't always the case, of course. Family worship and group Bible studies don't always include a person gifted to speak. But for the purposes of our comparison, we'll suppose that the person being paralleled to a preacher actually is truly gifted by the Holy Spirit for communicating Scripture. If so, whether he is a preacher or not, he is directed to do so *as the oracles of God* (1 Pet. 4:11)—that is, as if he were himself the *oracles*, God's words to the people. In this respect there should be no difference at all between the teacher and the preacher.

For example, I had a seminary professor who nearly always struck me as having this perspective when he expounded a Bible passage. I had him for Greek grammar, a class in homiletics, and another covering contemporary theologians. In all of these he was earnest. But there was a noticeable difference when it was the actual Scripture that he was explaining. His projection of authority increased markedly. I think that most of us felt it. We might not have known how to describe what he was doing, but in Peter's words, he was speaking

as the *oracles* [i.e., *utterances*] of God. Yet, even then, I don't recall classmates leaving the class and exclaiming, *That was preaching!* It wasn't. I don't think the professor himself would have called it that. But it felt similar, and I would explain that by the last two ways in which preaching and teaching are similar.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit may work effectually whenever His Word is communicated, no matter what the form. It isn't that He is active only when it is preached. In fact, He may sometimes be more recognizably at work in a Sunday school class than in the morning service to follow.

Fifth, when the Spirit of God is actively engaged in this way, there are results that are edifying. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 14 that this should always be the case, regardless of who is doing the speaking. He says that everyone in an assembly of believers may *prophesy* (an umbrella word here for the variety of ways in which truth may be communicated orally), and that when they do the spiritual effects should be felt even by lost people (vv. 24–25).

We have to recognize, then, that differentiating preaching from any other form of verbally communicating God's Word isn't to minimize these wonderful ways in which they often are similar. The content is the same, the speaker(s) may be gifted and speaking authoritatively, and the Holy Spirit may be working effectually to the edification of an entire group.

Is preaching, then, actually distinctive?

## DISTINCTIVES OF PREACHING

Before attempting to explain how preaching is, or at least ought to be different, I need to clarify two things.

The first is that the distinctiveness isn't in the location, or where the preaching is done. The hallmark of preaching isn't that a man is speaking from a pulpit in a church building. Preaching may be done in a rented hall, out in the fields, or in any number of circumstances. John Wesley preached from atop his father's cemetery stone. Jonah did his preaching up and down Nineveh's streets. C. H. Spurgeon preached his first sermon in a thatched cottage.

The second is that preaching is not defined by the day of the week or the time of the day when it is done. It should, of course, be an element of the worship when the Lord's people gather on the Lord's Day. But in addition to those occasions, a preacher may preach at any hour of any day or night of the week. This would certainly be one of the legitimate deductions from Paul's admonition to Timothy to preach both *in season* and *out of season* (2 Tim. 4:2).



So if place and time are not the distinctives of preaching, what are? I believe that it can be demonstrated scripturally, and also confirmed by both history and our own pulpit experiences, that there are certain *general* factors about preaching that make it a nearly unique form of communicating God's Word. In addition, I would argue that there are certain *specific* elements which, though not unique to preaching, are nevertheless noticeably heightened by it. It will take a second article to explain these specific elements, but for now we can begin by exploring the general factors that distinguish preaching.

The first general distinction is most certainly this: when preaching is going on, it is always being done by a *single* individual. It is never the conversing of a group, or communication by a panel, or a kind of tag-teaming between two or three people. That is not preaching. Preaching is the speaking of one person only. This is critical to understand, and I hope shortly to explain why this is so.

The other general factor about preaching that is a telling difference between it and all other forms of communicating the Scripture has to do with the people. What are they doing? What is their position during the preaching? The answer is that they are listeners *only*. Here again is a critical factor. The people are not verbally interactive. They are not contributing orally in any way. They are not adding their thoughts to everyone else's understanding of the passage or even to its applications. They are not raising questions or even requesting clarifications. This has been the case almost without exception throughout the entire history of the Church. Even today, in a climate of the increasing democratization of the churches, this is still so generally agreed upon that if someone does interrupt the preacher, even by raising his hand politely, he is perceived as being out of order.

I want to say more about these two factors in a moment. But first I think that it would be helpful to note something strikingly confirmatory that these are the two factors that do indeed generally differentiate preaching from all else: *these are the very elements which people are arguing could be improved upon*. Preaching, they say, doesn't engage people sufficiently because it is done by only one man, the preacher. No one else is getting to exercise his or her own gift of teaching. Everyone else is constrained to sit and just listen. How much more easily and receptively people might learn if the format encouraged their opening up in group conversation or one-on-one discipleship.

For the moment I won't attempt to respond to that criticism. I'm mentioning it only to expose the fact that it actually confirms my point. Preaching is recognizably distinctive by its being entirely a monologue. Whichever side of this issue you are on, you realize

this. In fact, this is so much the case, that it tends to be the nub of the debate. That, in turn, leads to the critical question.

## THE CRITICAL QUESTION

The single greatest issue about a man's communicating God's Word in this fashion is whether or not it is a scriptural arrangement. Is this format of one person monopolizing the communication a divinely appointed situation? Or is it merely our tradition? Have we continued until now to persist in this arrangement merely because it is conventional? Or is it truly a scriptural matter? The answer to that has, or should have, a significant bearing on the issue under consideration.

To answer that we have to open the Bible itself to see what is recorded. Do we find there that certain men are functioning in this way? The answer to that, of course is that we do. No one would dispute this. Here are solitary men, lifting up their voices to groups of people congregated around them, and these men are expecting that all of these other people will listen to them; and not just listen, but to do so quietly and submissively.

Now how is it that these few individuals took it upon themselves to speak to everyone else in this singular way? The answer that comes back from the Bible again and again is that they didn't! In fact, when you read their testimonies, you discover that some of them had no desire whatsoever to be in this position. They actually protested! They argued against it, and even ran from it. How then did they come to do it? The answer is always the same. They were *appointed* to it. They were *called* of God to do it: divinely constrained!

This is a very important point. When we open our Bibles and find this particular arrangement and the explanation for it, we're told that these men had no choice. God had ordained this very approach. They were to stand all alone and to speak authoritatively, unflinchingly, and insistently. Nothing else would suffice, even if it might seem more suited to getting a favorable response. I don't mean this facetiously, but for the sake of underscoring this point, imagine the divine response to an Elijah or a Jeremiah, a Paul, or a Timothy, if he had suggested that people might learn more effectively if there were more give-and-take to the meeting. When you read the Scriptures, either Old or New Testament, it's as clear as daylight that regardless of the reception, God called individual men to step forward and assume the stance of being a single, insistent, dominant voice. In fact, this is the very wording used by Scripture to identify one of human history's greatest preachers: *a voice of one crying* (John 1:23; cf. Isa. 40:3).

This leads to a second critical factor to take into account when weighing the biblical support for this distinctive

speaking arrangement. Have we ever given careful consideration to the particular word that the Holy Spirit uses for it? In the Greek New Testament there are nearly forty words for oral communication. The one that the Holy Spirit singles out for expressing to Timothy (and to every man thereafter with the same calling) his solemn responsibility, is the notable word *herald* (κηρύσσω; 2 Tim. 4:2). *Herald the word!* the Spirit says.

Before the days of moveable type, heralds were a recognizable means of mass communication to the public. They were the town criers. Thayer writes that in Greek authors from Homer down, a herald (κήρυξ) was *a messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, military commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand*. It seems to me especially significant that when defining the verb (κηρύσσω), he notes that this kind of speaking is *always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed*.

Pharaoh, for instance, commanded that Joseph ride in his second chariot and that they [*cry*] (ἐκήρυξεν; *herald*) *before him, Bow the knee* (Gen. 41:43). Nebuchadnezzar demanded that all were to fall down and worship the golden image when the *herald cried aloud* (ὁ κήρυξ ἐκήρυξε; Dan. 3:4).

This is precisely what we're seeing when we read of God's commanding Jonah with these words, *preach unto it [Nineveh] the preaching* (κήρυξον ἐν αὐτῇ κατὰ τὸ κήρυγμα) *that I bid thee* (Jonah 3:2). Note the dominant authority with which the prophet was to speak: *Herald in it according to the heralding that I bid thee!*

We're given this same sense of the authority of the situation when we read that *Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached* (ἐκήρυσσε) *Christ unto them* (Acts 8:5). He *heralded* the Lord Jesus.

The Holy Spirit informs us that this was also a prominent feature of the speaking ministry of our Lord. He taught the people, but He also was engaged in heralding. He was *teaching . . . and preaching* (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). You see this again in the ministry of Paul: *I am appointed a preacher (herald), and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles* (2 Tim. 1:11).

The sum of what emerges is this: there is a nearly unique relationship between speaker and people when preaching is taking place, and Scripture testifies that this is by divine determination. If we inquire what the nature of that relationship is, the term that the Holy Spirit chooses for portraying it is this unmistakable word, to *herald*. A preacher is authoritatively proclaiming a message, and in doing this, he is engaged with people in a way that can be differentiated even from teaching them. He is teaching, yes, but there is this additional note that is identifiable by this one significant word.

## WHY THIS FORM OF COMMUNICATING?

Why has God chosen this form of communicating His Word, when, by its very nature, it tends to exclude everyone else's voice? We find in the Scripture that it was this very feature which often irritated people rather than disposed them to hear. Why then has God ordained a communication that carries with it what appears to be such an inherent liability, such an apparent weakness? The answer may be that what appears to be the chief weakness of this form is actually its chief asset for accomplishing one of God's peculiar ends. What is that unusual asset to God's purposes?

*Preaching, more than any other form of communication, creates the situation (even visibly, for all to see) in which both God and men are placed emphatically in their only appropriate positions.*

God is being given His rightful, unique elevation as the only real speaker. The preacher (herald) is standing and speaking only at His pleasure and only what He has said. The people, on the other hand, are positioned in the only stance appropriate for men and women who are being addressed by God Himself: they are listeners. It is not for them to contribute a single word. They are recipients only!

This situation is evidently significant to the accomplishing of one of God's foremost purposes in communicating His truth to us. Cotton Mather expressed that purpose within his statement on what he calls the whole *design and intention* God has for preachers: *The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher, are to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men.*

*To restore the throne and dominion of God!* The great purpose of God for the preacher, Mather says, is to restore God to His supreme position in people's souls! What aids that? What portrays it and actually constrains it? Evidently, it is vividly put on display by a communication arrangement in which one person—an authorized proclaimer—is the only speaker. And the people, for their part, are not allowed to contribute, to discuss, or even to raise their hands to question. They are to hear! *Thus saith the LORD!* the preacher insists. And we are to listen, and to obey! To say, *Amen!*

So are our churches doing well to relinquish this arrangement by replacing it with anything else?

*To be continued.*

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## Christ Is All in All: What Christ Is Made to Believers by Philip Henry

On January 10, 1697, Mrs. Sarah Savage recorded in her diary,

This day, and the evening before I spent some time in reading my dear father’s sermons on Colossians 3:11, “Christ is all, and in all.” Blessed be God for these sweet, wholesome truths, to be food for my poor soul. He “being dead yet speaketh.” And what is it he says, but that which his heart was always full of? Christ. Christ. Christ. Methinks I hear him still, “Oh, make Christ your *all*!”<sup>1</sup>

The sermons she mentions were part of a collection passed on from her father, Philip Henry, who in his will encouraged his children to transcribe them “into their hearts and lives.”<sup>2</sup>

Philip Henry (1631–96) came to know Christ early under the preaching of Stephen Marshal. He was one of about two thousand English Puritan pastors forced out of their pulpits in the Great Ejection of 1662. But Philip Henry continued to minister God’s Word through providential opportunities, including training men for ministry, most notably his son Matthew.<sup>3</sup> Near the end of his life, Philip preached frequently to his household and neighbors in an outbuilding on his farm.<sup>4</sup>

In his last decade Philip Henry preached the forty-one sermons that he later bequeathed to his daughter. They eventually were published as an appendix under the title *On What Christ Is Made to Believers, in Forty Real Benefits*.<sup>5</sup> The theme verse is Colossians 3:11. Throughout the series he emphasizes the theme of the all-sufficiency of Christ for His people.

The sermons were simple. In each he proposed a statement of doctrine from a single verse of Scripture, then offered an outline and proceeded in a logical way. He often alliterated main points and subpoints without sacrificing accuracy in interpretation. He provided substantive biblical content, evidencing exegesis from both the Old and New Testaments. The sermons conclude with pointed application and earnest exhortation.

The topics of the sermons compiled in *Christ Is All in All* present Christ as

Our Foundation (1 Cor. 3:11).	Our Portion (Lam. 3:24).
Our Food (John 6:51).	Our Propitiation (1 John 4:10).
Our Root (John 15:5).	Our Freedom (John 8:36).
Our Raiment (Rom. 13:14).	Our Fountain (Zech. 13:1).
Our Head (Col. 1:18).	Our Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30).
Our Hope (1 Tim. 1:1).	Our Ensign (Isa. 11:10).
Our Refuge (Heb. 6:18).	Our Example (John 13:15).
Our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6).	Our Way to the Father (John 14:6).
Our Light (John 12:46).	The Door (John 10:9).
Our Life (Col. 3:4).	The Dew (Hosea 14:5).
Our Peace (Eph. 2:14).	
Our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7–8).	

Our Sun (Mal. 4:2).

Our Shield (Gen. 15:1).

Our Strength (Phil. 4:13).

Our Song (Ps. 118:14).

Our Horn of Salvation  
(Luke 1:68–69).

Our Honor (or “Precious,”  
1 Pet. 2:7).

Our Sanctification  
(1 Cor. 1:30).

Our Supply (Phil. 4:19).

Our Resurrection

(John 11:25–26).

Our Redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

Our Lesson (Eph. 4:20).

Our Ladder (Gen. 28:12).  
The Truth (John 1:17).

Our Treasure (Matt. 13:44).

Our Temple (Rev. 21:22).

An Ark (Heb. 11:7).

Our Altar (Heb. 13:10).

And our All (Col. 3:11).

Philip Henry’s theological views seem typical of those of other Puritans. He held to covenant theology. He did not always distinguish between Israel and the Church. He believed in infant baptism (though not salvific). He interpreted Song of Solomon in terms of Christ’s love for the Church instead of love between a husband and wife. I did not find these views so pervasive as to distract those who may differ. As I read the sermons I was truly edified and enlightened, and my heart was warmed. Philip’s careful explanation and close application of Scripture’s teaching about Christ frequently stirred my heart to greater devotion and confidence in my Lord and Savior.

One of my favorite sermons is “Christ Is Our Peace” (Eph. 2:14). Henry asserts that man has quarreled with God since the Garden of Eden. This quarrel is mutual, universal, and growing, made worse by our continual transgressions. For God’s part it is righteous. We have broken God’s law and committed treason against His crown, and our sins have incurred a great debt. But Christ has graciously intervened and made peace with God by becoming our Mediator and atoning for our sins. Through Christ’s blood, God’s wrath is appeased. God’s Spirit convicts sinners of their sin, shows them the foolishness of resisting God’s power, and assures those who repent of their reconciliation. Only misery awaits God’s enemies, but those who turn to Christ will enjoy peace with God in time and eternity. Christ also brings peace with others (even Jew and Gentile), and He grants peace of conscience. In all these things, Jesus is our Peace.

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage* (Boston: Armstrong, Crocker and Brewster, 1821), 153.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 339–40.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Harman, *Matthew Henry: His Life and Influence*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>5</sup> *The Miscellaneous Works of Matthew Henry* (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1830), title page.



## Is There Not a Cause? (1 Samuel 17:29)

We hear a lot of sermons in our lifetimes. We listen to preaching in church, via online sites such as SermonAudio, at Christian camps, and in the chapel services of Christian schools and colleges. Over the years we hear some messages that we think are commendable examples of expository preaching and others that fall significantly short of good interpretation. I remember one sermon from the life of David that failed any measure of interpretational accuracy. The preacher of that message apparently did not even read the passage in any other version except the KJV. God has graciously given us multiple Bible versions in English done by scholars who uphold a firm commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. Church members often bring these translations with them to services and follow along as the pastor brings his message. These dear believers should never leave a service wondering why their version translated a particular text differently from the version the pastor used.

In the context of 1 Samuel 17 Jesse has sent his son David to carry provisions for his three older brothers who are on the front lines of the battle against the Philistines. For forty days in a row Goliath has been taunting the army of Israel to put forward someone to fight him, but the Israelite soldiers have been uniformly afraid to meet Goliath's challenge. When David arrives on the battlefield, he hears Goliath's arrogant words of disdain for the armies of the living God. As the Israelite soldiers shrink back in terror from this huge Philistine, they even acknowledge that King Saul would enrich anyone who could kill Goliath—even making such a brave warrior the king's son-in-law and declaring his father's household free from taxes and conscription. Apparently to make sure that he had not misunderstood what the soldiers had said about the great reward for the man who would slay Goliath, David asks, "What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel?" (1 Sam. 17:26).

This simple question caused David's oldest brother, Eliab, to become enraged. He proudly accused David of having wrong motives for even being at the battlefield: "I know thy pride, and the naughtiness [NASB, "insolence"] of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle" (1 Sam. 17:28). Eliab even mockingly wonders who David has left to care for his few sheep. David responds to Eliab's question and demeaning rhetoric in verse 29, translated in the KJV by the phrase, "Is there not a cause?" The preacher I heard then developed his message by enumerating the important causes Christians must embrace. He asserted that we must be good soldiers of Jesus Christ by forsaking entanglement in worldly

pursuits (see 2 Tim. 2:3–4). Of course, this is a thoroughly biblical mandate, but is this what 1 Samuel 17:29 teaches? Here is a literal translation of what David says in verse 29: "Was it not a word?" There are two main considerations in the interpretation of this phrase.

First, people who spoke Hebrew were often quite economical with their words when asking questions. The task of the translator is to examine the context and fill in the appropriate English words so that it makes sense to a modern reader. A good example of this phenomenon appears in Judges 18:3, where a group of Danites asks a Levite a series of three questions. Here is a literal translation: "Who brought you here? And what you doing in this? And what for you here?" Translators of 1 Samuel 17:29 should not be surprised, therefore, that they have to examine the context of the verse to determine what additional words they need to select.

Second, the key to a correct translation involves the antecedent of the pronoun "it" in the phrase "was *it* not a word". In context David must be referring to the question he asked in verse 26 about what would be done for the man who killed Goliath. David's question is what incurred the wrath of Eliab. Here are some different translations of verse 29:

"Was it not just a question?" (NASB).

"Was it not but a word?" (ESV).

"Can't I even speak?" (NIV).

"It was just a question" (HCSB).

In contrast to arrogant Goliath and proud Eliab, David's words and actions in the narrative indicate that he manifested a humble heart. He humbly guarded those few sheep in the wilderness by protecting them from dangerous, predatory beasts. He humbly carried out Jesse's command to take provisions to his older brothers. And his overriding concern was for God's glory, not his own personal wellbeing. The overall biblical theological theme of Samuel involves God's control of His leaders. He promotes those who manifest humility and debases those who are proud. That is why He commanded Samuel to anoint David as the next king (1 Sam. 16:11–13). As the perfect King in the lineage of David, our Savior was the epitome of humility.

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## Puritans: Masters of the Illustrative Art

The Puritans injected vials of illustrative medicine into their expositions. The Puritan vocabulary was extraordinarily illustrative and metaphorical. This edition of *Windows* groups Puritan illustrations around various categories of scriptural truths. The illustrative language is *italicized and bold* in each example.

### SALVATION

Preaching on the text God used in 1979 to convince me of my need for Christ (Ezek. 33:11, “Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”), Nathaniel Vincent (1639–97) said,

Do not let the pleasures of these evil ways *ensnare you*. The pleasures of sin usually delight only the more brutish part of man. A rational human being acts below himself when he *nurses pleasures that are shared by the beasts*. Solomon had an abundance of them. Whatever his eyes desired, he gave them; he did not withhold his heart from any joy. But later he found these pleasures to be so meaningless, so base and unsuitable, that, in the midst of them, he cried out Eccl. 2:10–11 (“All is vanity and vexation of spirit”). Pleasures may seem like *delightful dreams*, but they are short-lived. Affliction and death, or hell itself, soon awaken us. Those who love pleasure more than God do not really know what they choose and what they refuse. Promised pleasure is *the bait that covers sin, causing us to swallow it* with eagerness. It is *the fatal potion that stupefies* you and makes you lie senseless while in extreme danger. Promised pleasures are *the fine—but very strong—cord that Satan uses* to draw men down to the *chambers of death*. Indeed, they are *the fuel that heats the burning lake*.

### CHASTISEMENT

Andrew Gray (1634–56), in a sermon titled “God’s Threatening Rod,” took as his text Micah 6:9 (“The LORD’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it”). His thesis was that “every trial encountered by the Christian has a voice and language in it.” Gray’s introduction is riveting.

It is no great deal if a Christian be put in *a furnace hot seven times* more than ordinary, if one in the form and likeness of the son of man walk up and down with him in the furnace. Is it not Christ’s presence which makes *a*

*wilderness like the garden of the Lord*? Is it not Christ’s presence which makes afflictions pleasant? Is it not Christ’s presence which makes *a crown of thorns a crown of joy*? Is it not Christ’s presence which makes heaven pleasant? And must it not be Christ’s presence that makes the earth pleasant also; I confess, desertion under the cross is one of the most sad and affecting conditions which a Christian may encounter. However, though it may endure long, there will be *a blessed exchange of cups, that instead of a cup of bitterness, which is presented to a Christian to drink*, while he is here below, he shall have *a cup of eternal consolations* that is above, presented unto him from the hand of the Lord. I think a Christian may be poor in possession, but rich in hope. I think a Christian may not have much, as to his sensible enjoyments, but may he not cast up his eyes unto the eternal inheritance, and cry out, yonder is my portion—in that land do my hopes rest?

### PRIDE

John Owen (1616–83), in “Temptation Resisted and Repulsed,” commented on Peter’s pledge (Matt. 26:35, “Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee”): “Temptation is *like a knife*. It may be useful to *cut the meat, or to cut the throat* of a man. It may be *a man’s food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction*.”

### CONSCIENCE

Samuel Bolton (1606–54) remarked on David’s conscience smiting him for his sin of numbering Israel: “If conscience is not *a bridle*, it will be *a whip*. If it is not *a curb*, it will be *a scourge*. If you will not hear the warnings, you shall feel the *lashings of conscience*. If it does not restrain from sin by admonition, it will put us to pain by contrition.”

### HUMILITY

One of the five most influential books in my life is *The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes (1577–1635). Sibbes uses language so picturesque and insightful that the reader does not just *hear* the point but *feels* it all the way down to the bone. He suggests that Christ’s way is to first bruise and then to heal, so that we will see ourselves as “*reeds and not trees, as flickering wicks, not raging infernos*. Not only are we but reeds, but *bruised reeds* at that,

*not only wicks, but smoldering* so as to go out entirely. . . . We need bruising so that reeds may know themselves to be reeds, and *not oaks*.”

Regarding the ongoing struggle with sin, and so helpful in forming proper theological views in relation to sanctification, his comments are, for me personally, like salve to the whole of my body, soul, and spirit.

The reason for *this mixture* is that we carry about a double principle—Grace and nature. God especially uses this ongoing inner struggle to preserve us from two *dangerous rocks* which our natures are prone to be *dashed upon*: Our sense of security and our Pride. This inward struggle forces us to depend more fully on being justified through Christ rather than the experience of our sanctification.

## COMFORTING THE WEAK

Sibbes offers encouraging comfort to the Christian who faces fierce temptation.

Some think they have no faith at all because they have no full assurance, whereas the *fairest fire* that can be will have *some smoke*. The best actions will *smell of the smoke*. The *mortar wherein garlic has been stamped will always smell of it*; so all our actions will savor something of the old man. . . . Some again are haunted with *hideous representations* to their imaginations, and with vile and unworthy thoughts of God, of Christ, of the Word, which, as *busy flies*, disquiet and molest their peace. These are cast in like *wildfire* by Satan. . . . The more sin is seen, the more it is hated, and therefore it is less. *Dust particles* are in a room before the *sun shines*, but they only appear then. . . . Nor is *smoke* so offensive to us as *light* is pleasant to us, since it yields an evidence of the truth of grace in the heart.

## PRAYER

John Burgess (1563–1635) said of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that it is “a *pearl* in the *gold* of the Bible.” It is comforting and powerfully assuring in the extreme.

This prayer of Christ may be compared to a land flowing with *milk and honey*, in respect to that *treasure of consolation*. . . . Seeing therefore this is such a *fountain for healing* and refreshing, come with a spiritual thirst to be replenished. Seeing here is the *honeycomb*, do not with Jonathan taste a little honey only, but eat freely and abundantly. . . . Christ is to be set up the only foundation, in respect of mediation and intercession with God. We can have no approach to God without him, because of *the great gulf sin hath railed* between him and us. He is *a consuming fire*, and we are *stubble*, without Christ.

## AFFLICTION

How often is the preacher compelled to call upon to cautiously apply to weary Christians the great truth of Romans 8:28! Thomas Watson (1620–86), in his sermon “All Things Work for Good,” colors his exposition of this passage with illustrative language.

All things work for his good—the best and worst things. “Unto the upright arises light in darkness” (Psa. 112:4). The most *dark cloudy* providences of God, have some *sunshine* in them. What a blessed condition is a true believer in! When he dies, he goes to God; and while he lives, everything shall do him good. Affliction is for his good. What hurt does the *fire to the gold*? It only purifies it. What hurt does *the winnowing fan do to the grain*? It only separates the chaff from it. God never uses His staff—but to *beat out the dust*. Affliction does that which the Word many times will not, it “opens the ear to discipline” (Job 36:10). When God lays men upon their backs—then they look up to heaven! God’s smiting His people is *like the musician’s striking upon the violin, which makes it put forth a melodious sound*. How much good comes to the saints by affliction! *Like bruised flowers—when they are pounded and broken—they send forth their sweetest smell*. Affliction is *a bitter root*—but it bears *sweet fruit*. “It yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Affliction is *the highway to heaven; though it be flinty* (filled with hard rocks) *and thorny*—yet it is the best way. Poverty shall *starve our sins*; sickness shall make grace more helpful (2 Cor. 4:16).

## WATCHFULNESS

The fitting conclusion must be John Bunyan (1628–88) and his illustration of a man in an iron cage from *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Christian was led

into a very dark room, where there sat a man in *an iron cage*. Now, the man . . . seemed very sad. He sat with *his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together; and he sighed as if he would break his heart*. . . . Then said Christian to the man, “What art thou?” The man answered, “I was once a *fair and flourishing* Christian, both in mine own eyes, and also in the eyes of others. . . . I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this *iron cage*. I cannot get out.” “But how camest thou in this condition?” “I left off to watch and be sober. I *gave free reins* to sin; I sinned against the light of the Word and the goodness of God. . . . I have so hardened my heart that I *cannot turn*.” . . . “Well,” said Christian, “this is fearful! God help me to watch and be sober, and to pray, that I may shun the cause of this man’s misery.”

---

**Todd Nye** has pastored in South Carolina and Ohio and has travelled for the last six years doing Bible conferences, evangelistic meetings, and church assessment and revitalization. He is currently seeking a full-time pastorate.



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**Midwest Regional Fellowship**

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3260 State Route 314  
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**September 12, 2023**

**NYC Regional Fellowship**

Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
718.615.1002

**October 14, 2023**

**New England Regional Fellowship**

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

**October 16-17, 2023**

**Central Regional Fellowship**

Village Bible Church  
1301 Osage Ave.  
Salina, KS 67401

**October 19-20, 2023**

**New Mexico Regional Fellowship**

Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

## 2024

**January 30, 2024**

**Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship**

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

**February 5-6, 2023**

**FBFI Winter Board Meeting**

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

**March 11-12, 2024**

**Northwest Regional Fellowship**

Westside Baptist Church  
1375 Irving Rd.  
Eugene, OR 97404

**March 11-13, 2024**

**South Regional Fellowship**

Catawba Springs Baptist Church  
6801 Ten Ten Rd.  
Apex, NC 27539-8692

**April 18-19, 2024**

**Northern California Regional Fellowship**

Campbell Bible Church  
151 Sunnyside Ave.  
Campbell, CA 95008

**June 10-12, 2024**

**FBFI Annual Fellowship**

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

## News From All Over



**Dr. Bud Steadman** became the executive director of Baptist World Mission in 2009. Over the last fourteen years, he reached many of the goals he set back then, and he turned the role of director over to **Dr. Ben Sinclair** on April 1. Dr. Steadman will continue with BWM in a new full-time role as "missions mentor," preaching and partnering with local churches and their God-called missionaries, providing biblical counsel in solving their mission challenges, and thus advancing the work of God worldwide.

**Dr. David Stertzbach Sr.** serves with Gospel Fellowship Association as the interim pastor at Berean Baptist Church in Fairfield, California, as the church seeks a permanent pastor.



**Caleb Phelps** was installed as the senior pastor at Faith Baptist Church, Taylors, South Carolina, on Sunday, April 23, following a special service at which his father, **Pastor Chuck Phelps**, was the speaker. Caleb and his

wife, Rachel, served at Faith Baptist Church, Palm Bay, Florida, before moving to South Carolina. Caleb also serves on the FBFI Advisory Board.



**Pastor Mike Raab** has recently accepted the call to the pastorate at Abilene Bible Baptist Church in Abilene, Kansas, since **Pastor Carson Johnson's** retirement. Pastor Johnson served there for over forty-six years and has left behind a solid congregation of believers with whom the Lord has given Mike and Evangeline a wonderful closeness. They are praising the Lord for their new ministry!



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# Failures Aren't Finished

**T**he people gasped as the preacher thrust his right hand into the flickering flames. Moments earlier, he had explained this unusual move. “Forasmuch as my hand has offended, writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for when I come to the fire,” he declared, “it shall first be burned.” For us, he illustrates that fickle failures aren’t finished. It was March 21, 1556. And as Thomas Cranmer finished his surprising sermon, he was tied to the stake to be burned. “Bloody Mary” had ordered his execution.

What will you be saying, and what will you be praying, when you come to your dying day? Few of us will be forced to face a martyr’s death. But all of us feel regret over our many fickle failures. So as you face the ultimate transition—from this life to the next—remember that failures aren’t finished.

## **SAMSON**

About 1080 BC another fickle failure stood shackled and mocked by a sneering crowd. He prayed, “Let me die!” and pushed outward with all his might. Samson served the Lord for twenty years as mighty judge in Israel. Before he was born, the Lord had ordained him with a special angelic announcement. The Lord had

declared Samson to be a special Nazirite from his mother’s womb. This meant that he was to abstain from wine, avoid what was unclean (such as a corpse) and never cut his hair.<sup>1</sup> Samson was endowed with supernatural strength to accomplish his God-given mission.

But little by little he ignored the Lord’s commands. He touched a lion’s corpse and drank with the enemy. And later Samson allowed a wicked woman to cut his hair. Then his enemies gathered around to attack him. Samson “awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself.” In a sad commentary on insensible Samson, the story goes on: “But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.”<sup>2</sup>

The enemies put out the eyes of that mighty judge of Israel and shackled him to a grindstone. Perhaps the apostle Peter thought of Samson when he later issued a startling warning about the importance of humble, obedient perseverance: “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”<sup>3</sup>

Is it really possible for a backslidden believer to blindly forget that he or she has entered into a saving relationship with the holy God? Yes. Peter described a backslider named Lot, a resident of Sodom, in a similar manner.<sup>4</sup> And believe it or not, Lot was a believer. Like Samson, his choices vexed his righteous soul.<sup>5</sup>

But fickle failures aren’t finished. Grinding away, the blinded judge was tormented by awful grief. “However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.” Perhaps the prophet Micah remembered Samson when he wrote,

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy;  
When I fall, I will arise;  
When I sit in darkness,  
The LORD will be a light to me.<sup>6</sup>

For you see, in spite of all Samson’s foolhardy mistakes, the hair of his head began to grow again. And unbeknown to his enemies, his supernatural strength slowly returned as well. Boasting about the victory of their false gods, the Philistines brought out blind Samson to entertain three thousand people in their temple.<sup>7</sup> He asked to be

Continued on page 33

**FOR YOU SEE, IN SPITE OF ALL SAMSON'S FOOLHARDY MISTAKES, THE HAIR OF HIS HEAD BEGAN TO GROW AGAIN.**



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# Preparing for Life's Final Transition

**M**y wife, Tricia, and I have been in an interesting and important phase of our lives for the last few years—caring for aging parents. In 2020 Tricia's parents, Larry and Nancy, moved in with us, and we became their primary-care providers. Just over five short months after they moved in, Nancy unexpectedly passed away. Larry, who struggled with Parkinson-like symptoms, stayed with us through the next year, but eventually his health and care needs reached a point where we needed to transition him to a care center. Larry entered glory in October 2021. My parents are on a similar path. My dad has Parkinson's, and my mom has Alzheimer's. Though they lived on their own for the last few years with lots of assistance from family, friends, and caregivers, they have recently had to move into a care center for round-the-clock care.

On one hand, this end-of-life care is fairly straightforward: elderly parents need loving care, and we were glad to honor God and honor our parents by helping. On the other hand, this process is very complicated and involves way more than what we initially understood. Our experience of caring for our parents has been filled with

paradoxes. Caring for parents involves a lot of hard, tiring work, but it is also incredibly rewarding. At times, it is full of sorrow and tears, but it also has given us irreplaceable memories of joy and love. Providing long-term care can be stressful and confusing, but it has taught us and our children invaluable lessons about sacrifice and selfless love.

## A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Let's consider care for elderly parents biblically. First, we know that because of sin and the fall all people will die (Rom. 5:12). In Psalm 90 Moses observed that while people live typically seventy to eighty years, life is full of labor and sorrow until "we fly away" (Ps. 90:10). Though death is our enemy (1 Cor. 15:54–55), it is inevitable for us all.

Second, as we grow older, we lose our strength and eventually need care. In Psalm 71 the psalmist pled, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth" (v. 10; cf. v. 18). Paul explained the reality that our bodies waste away as we age (2 Cor. 4:16) and called our earthly bodies "vile," "mortal," and "corruptible" (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:53–54). Facing the realities of our body's

decline as we age is perhaps the hardest transition we will ever face.

Third, God expects families to care and provide for their elderly parents. Caring for one's parents is an essential aspect of honoring one's father and mother (Exod. 20:12). Jesus condemned the traditions of the Pharisees that allowed Jews to avoid honoring their parents by giving an offering instead (Mark 7:9–13). Paul echoed this expectation in his teaching concerning widows in 1 Timothy 5. Children (and even grandchildren) were expected to honor their widowed mother by providing for them (v. 5). Paul warned, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). In Psalm 127 Solomon called children "an heritage of the LORD" and "his reward" (v. 3). He compared the blessing of children to having a quiver full of arrows—a war-time picture of children defending their parents: "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Ps. 127:5). This last verse no doubt applies especially to elderly parents, who are very vulnerable.



The roles of provision and protection are flipped between parents and children.

The biblical pattern that emerges in Scripture is clear. As parents age and face their inevitable decline, they should never face it alone. Thankfully, believers can walk through this final transition with the strength and comfort of the Lord. He is the Good Shepherd who calms the fears of those walking through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). But parents should also face their final transition with the love, support, and protection of their children. Part of this support may very well include long-term care, whether it is at home or in a care center. God is pleased when children honor their parents in this way.

## PAUL WARNED, “BUT IF ANY PROVIDE NOT FOR HIS OWN, AND SPECIALLY FOR THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSE, HE HATH DENIED THE FAITH, AND IS WORSE THAN AN INFIDEL” (1 TIM. 5:8).

### ADVICE FOR PARENTS

If you are a parent who is approaching the transition towards end-of-life circumstances, I want to provide some advice for you to prepare for your final transition. If you address these areas, they will be a tremendous blessing to your family.

1. *Take care of financial matters and legal matters.* Plan your estate. Check all the beneficiaries on all your accounts to make sure they are accurate and up to date. Make sure your will is current or create a trust. Take care of legal matters such as appointing someone as your power of attorney and executor of your estate. A few meetings with a lawyer to establish a POA and plan your estate can save your family time, expense, and lots of headaches down the road.
2. *Plan for the transfer of property and possessions.* There are two values for everything: monetary and sentimental, and different people value things differently. Try to pass on the most important family possessions before it is too late. Reducing your material possessions may be a tremendous blessing to your family as they attempt to deal with sorting, storing, or dividing the items.

3. *Plan for end-of-life care.* Complete health directives and a healthcare proxy so your loved ones know how you want to be cared for. Appoint a medical power of attorney who can make decisions if you are incapacitated. Work with your children to decide what kind of care will work if long-term care is needed. Long-term care insurance or social services play a huge role in these decisions, but so does each family member.
4. *Plan your funeral and prepay for funeral and burial expenses.* These types of plans will be a tremendous blessing for your children as they grieve and try to handle the stress of your homegoing. The expenses for a funeral, casket,

burial plot, and memorial stone really add up. Prepaying these expenses and expressing your wishes will alleviate the burden of finances and decision making for your family.

5. *Communicate with all your children about your plans.* Many families experience division and strife as they care for their parents and handle end-of-life circumstances. Parents can greatly reduce conflict by preparing their children for the tough questions. Making your intentions known is very important.

### ADVICE FOR ADULT CHILDREN

If your parents are facing long-term care circumstances, I would like to give you some advice that may help you think through how to care for them.

1. *Prioritize your parents' welfare.* Making important decisions can be difficult, especially under the weight of urgent, critical health issues. Keeping your parents' health and welfare as a guiding principle through the decision-making process is key. Honoring your parents will help you to honor God.
2. *Consider all the options.* Before we moved Tricia's parents in with us,

we did a lot of research into what options were available. In addition, we consulted with other families who had provided similar care for their parents. Consult with local care centers, social workers, insurance providers, and spiritual leaders. Above all, pray and seek wisdom from God.

3. *Consider finances and facilities.* Caring for parents over the long term demands considerable resources. Before Larry and Nancy moved in with us, we had to move into a house that could accommodate both their needs and our family's needs. Creating a friendly living space for the elderly can take time and money. Realize that if your parents need to move to a care center, the expenses are very high.
4. *Seek the help of others.* Caring for elderly parents can be very demanding and exhausting. We found that we needed help to provide the right care and get enough rest to stay healthy ourselves. Everyone has limits. Church members, friends, and family all chimed in to help carry the load and provide us with needed breaks. Recognizing your own limits is important in this process.
5. *Communicate with your parents and family.* Notice communication is on both lists. Keeping open lines of communication is important to healthy relationships. Both Tricia's siblings and my siblings regularly have group chats to keep everyone updated and on the same page. We have found that it is critical to work together to provide the best care for parents.

Caring for parents is a divinely appointed interruption to our busy lives and agendas. I am sure that many could look at such care as an overwhelming burden. On the contrary, Tricia and I considered it a wonderful blessing to care for our parents. It is both a great responsibility and great privilege. May God grant you wisdom and strength as you honor your parents.

Dr. Douglas Brown serves as the dean and senior professor at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa. He and Tricia have four children.



# At Home in God's Grace

**W**e women are nesters. Nesters spend much time creating a decorative, comfortable, secure, haven. There's a sense of security that comes with sleeping in your bed, cooking with familiar tools and appliances, and knowing your next-door neighbors. Maybe we find stability living in the same location for many years with our network of friends, family, ministry, and church.

### A HOMEBODY LEAVING HOME

I'm a homebody. Living abroad, whether in missions or otherwise, never interested me. Most missionaries from my church went to primitive countries and lived in bungalows or block-wall houses. I was always glad God called them and not me. Even though I had a teaching degree, I was certain the Lord had not qualified me to be in a pastor's wife position. However, when I met Jerry and discovered his interest in foreign missions, God started working on my resistant heart. I eventually surrendered to missions but with the qualifier that God place us not too far from the USA. Well, He sent us to New Zealand, which is nearly the farthest place to travel to from the US without leaving the planet!

I needed God's grace to leave home. In 1994 we accepted the call to serve as furlough replacements for one year in New Zealand. Despite my fears of being a pastor's wife and living in someone else's home in an unfamiliar culture, I decided I could

survive because there was an end date. What I didn't plan for was how God would change my heart that year. None of my fears were ever realized. Instead, God gave me a love for the New Zealand people. He forged fruitfulness even though my self-estimation was "uselessness." Teens were saved and baptized, Bible study groups grew, and new Sunday school classes started. I was so sure God couldn't use me, yet He took my ounce of willingness and did the spectacular! Instead of being overjoyed that our one-year mission work finally finished, I was gripped by an overwhelming burden to reach souls on that island. Even though we returned to our newly remodeled home in the States, resumed our jobs, and spent time with family, I couldn't wait to get back to New Zealand. Something dramatically had changed and I knew it had nothing to do with me but everything to do with God.

I also needed God's grace for a far-away home. In 1998 we shipped a twenty-foot container with all our earthly possessions and moved permanently to New Zealand with full support. During our first ten years we rented a house and made that our home. Then the sale of our stateside home allowed us to buy a section and build in New Zealand. This new house became our dream home, situated in the country yet very near town, with extensive lake and mountain views. It was quiet and peaceful. My husband

often teased me and asked, "Do you like our little dirt bungalow the Lord provided?" The ministry grew, and our home became the hub for numerous ministries and church functions. I never imagined missionary life could be so fun and fulfilling and that God would give me more than my heart could desire! We were so "at home" in New Zealand that we felt like visitors to the US during each furlough season.

### A MISSIONARY LEAVING HOME

Then in 2021 the Lord started leading us to return to the US. Humanly speaking we were living the dream life as fully supported missionaries in a beautiful country. We nested there for twenty-four years and accumulated our fair share of creature comforts. A global move felt insurmountable and emotionally overwhelming. Yet how could I cling to my contentment and familiarities when I knew the Lord was directing us back to the States? Remembering God's grace in the past and His abundant provision became my most outstanding "familiarity" to which I could cling! Instead of this being the most dreaded experience of my life, it became the most exciting adventure filled with so many miracles. First Thessalonians 5:24 promises us, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." I couldn't wait to see what He was going to do next!



In November 2021 our home went on the market, and eight days later we had five offers to consider. The highest bidder bought our home fully furnished, alleviating the tedious marketing of each piece. With expensive shipping estimates (a thousand dollars per square yard!), we reduced all our material possessions to eight cubic yards, which still cost \$8000 to ship. God gave me joy in doing something I had thought would be emotionally impossible to do: selling some items and giving the rest to dear friends. Our church family gave us a wonderful gift that covered our shipping costs.

Selling a furnished home also meant that we could live and sleep there until the day of our departure. On January 26, 2022, we woke to a beautiful summer day. After loading our last belongings into our suitcases, we drove away, not looking back, but looking forward to our next ministry appointment. Even as I watched the lights of New Zealand disappear from my plane window, I had settled peace to travel this new path. It was as though God had parted the Pacific for us.

Now I need God's grace for a future home. While we wait for Him to direct us to our next ministry, I'm learning to find contentment living in the various places He provides. I want to be settled again, but in the meantime Isaiah 40:31 has taken on new meaning: "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

I don't know how I ended up loving life as a missionary pastor's wife when I dreaded the very thought of missions and living overseas. And I don't know how I managed to let go of everything I dearly loved in New Zealand to move across the globe with just a few boxes of material possessions and no assurance of what's next. The hymn writer explained it well: "Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

**Linda Craven** and her husband, Jerry, served twenty-five years in New Zealand with Gospel Fellowship Association. During Linda's ministry as a pastor's wife, biblical counselor, and mentor she also published a daily devotional book through Amazon called *Proverbs: The Walk to Wisdom*. She and Jerry transitioned back to the USA in 2022 and are currently seeking ministry opportunities.



## Ministry as One

Continued from page 13

### GOD COMMANDS SERVICE-MINISTRY

*Pure motivation for ministering comes through recognizing God's redemptive plan, Christ's sacrificial model, and cultivating the desire to glorify God through lovingly caring for others.* Romans 10–11 shows us that God specifically moves toward people to accomplish His purposes, taking His truth to them and opening their eyes and hearts so they may believe. God modeled how to serve others by remaining faithful to Israel, continually stretching out His hand toward them while grafting in others to His original plan. So, too, we should stretch out our hands to others continually.

Watering plants or housesitting can relieve others' minds. I've served others from time to time by driving people to and from the airport, even though flight times may range from late night to early hours. I've approached people specifically to ask what they need at times when I already plan to run errands. Sometimes this helps others to be willing to accept help. Christ modeled ministry to us by humbling Himself to God the Father's plan. He ministered to many people, unaffected by their status. Caring for others means caring for what they care about.

### MINISTRIES OF SINGLE WOMEN

*Single women who pursue godliness and seek to honor God by loving others will find ways to bless others.* Romans 12:9–19 sets the foundation for appropriately ministering to and serving others. Humbleness, faithfulness, obedience, and genuine love reflect our Lord. Single women may equip themselves (the church should help with this) to serve in positions such as teachers for women or children, the church clerk, the church secretary, the church treasurer, or an assistant to the pastoral staff. Some churches may create a biblical counseling avenue in which singles can participate. Other churches may be blessed by having a single oversee hospitality, decorations, or events.

Building an effective ministry as a single woman takes time. Nonetheless, the

following are simple ways a single woman can minister to the body of Christ:

- Pray for the church body.
- Offer hospitality.
- Visit those needing encouragement.
- Deliver a meal.
- Give money to others in need.
- Call or write visitors, members, and missionaries.
- Take a walk with someone.
- Be present in times of need.
- Run errands.
- Cook for a widower.
- Listen to others and offering godly counsel.
- Babysitting.

God often uses our life experiences as occasions to come alongside others and teach by modeling what is appropriate in a situation. For example, a church friend once asked to attend a viewing with me. She had never been to one and was uncertain what to do, say, or expect.

Single women should know God's Word and have high regard for its truths, living them out by genuinely loving the church and faithfully supporting its focuses. A single woman who builds deep and meaningful relationships could serve by offering her presence in people's lives, and, in time, become part of a family's highs and lows.

What honor, privilege, and joy come when we cultivate godly relationships based in loving God and His people wholeheartedly. We singles can become "sisters," "aunties," and godly examples to young and older women alike. God's plan is good: ministering as a single woman proves to be one of the richest blessings of being a part of a local church!

**Karis Cole**, daughter of Howard and Judy Cole, serves as a faculty member at Faith Baptist Bible College. Prior to teaching, Karis was an administrative assistant to the CFO/VP of Business and the VP of Advancement at FBBC&TS. In her free time Karis enjoys cooking with friends, connecting with church members, reading, and exploring.





**T**he Bible is not an assortment of random revelations collected together into major literary categories, nor is it a catalog of laws and doctrines and theological ideas. The Bible doesn't begin with a "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" (though there are plenty of those along the way) or a list of doctrinal propositions to be believed (though there are plenty of those along the way as well). The Bible opens as a story, the ultimate "once upon a time": *In the beginning*. . . .

The Bible is *the* Story. We understand intuitively and experientially that there are differences between stories—that some are fictional, and others are true and trustworthy because they are stories of reality. The Bible is the narrative of reality, the story of how we got where we are and where everything is headed and why. It is the story of the Great King who bequeathed a kingdom to a race created in His own image, how that race rebelled against the King, and what He is doing to bring them back to Himself and to return the kingdom of this earth to them through the self-sacrificial death, personal conquest, and shared reign of His own Son.

Derek Kidner notes that Genesis is unique in Ancient Near Eastern literature: "No work that is known to us from the Ancient Near East is remotely comparable . . . with the book of Genesis. . . . One of the impressive facts about the OT, and about Genesis within it, is this forward thrust towards a consummation which is foretold yet, in detail, unforeseeable" (*Genesis*, 13–14). In other words, *Genesis is the beginning of a story*.

## BACKGROUND OF GENESIS

Moses wrote Genesis, though we don't know exactly when. Was it revealed to him during the forty days on Sinai? During the wilderness wanderings? The original target audience was the Israelites as they came out of Egypt and prepared to conquer Canaan (at God's direction). Genesis would have given God's people an understanding of their divinely favored origin and background, their unique covenantal relationship to God (as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), their providential history—including the fact that not only their deliverance but their enslavement and preservation in Egypt for four hundred years was foreordained in the plan of God (Gen. 15:13)—and their privileged calling in God's plan for the world.

## THEMES IN GENESIS

*Beginnings*. Genesis (meaning "origins") is appropriately named because it records several key beginnings in history. It is, literally and literarily, the beginning of divine speech, creation, humanity, marriage, sin, sacrifice, clothing, family, prayer, covenants, languages, nations, and a chosen individual as the beginning of a chosen people called Israel. But these beginnings are all underway by Genesis 12.

*God's Words*. "God said/spoke" (*Elohim* + *'amar*) occurs thirty

times in Genesis (only eight times in the rest of the Pentateuch). One of the major poolings of this expression is Genesis 1–2. "Most striking is God's use of His spoken word to create" (Steinmann, *Genesis*, 24). God begins the Bible by showcasing the trustworthiness of His words. Bible readers are familiar with the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20. "Decalogue" literally means the "Ten Words"—not as in just ten individual words, but ten statements or sayings. But the Bible also *opens* with a Decalogue—a series of ten words from God, in Genesis. Ten times Genesis 1 reads, "And God said, Let such-and-such happen"—ten statements from God. And every time He spoke, what He said is exactly what happened (1:3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 21, 24, 27, 30). On one level, of course, this language conveys the creative power of God. But the more basic truth that we tend to overlook is that *what God says is what happens*. Because He didn't have to create this way. And He didn't have to *tell* us that He created everything this way. But from the first chapter of your Bible—from the very first words out of His mouth—God wants you to understand something not just about Him but about His words. The way God chose to create and the way God chose to record how He created hammer the point home ten times over. His words convey reality. He does exactly what He says. What He says happens. His words are inherently reliable. The Bible's story begins not just with a theology of creation, but with a theology of God's words. The Bible's very first chapter is an argument for the reliability of every word God speaks . . . for the rest of the story!

*God's Covenants*. The Hebrew term *berith* occurs 26 times in Genesis. Genesis expressly identifies two covenants that God initiates with humans. The *Noahic covenant* (6:18; 9:9–17) was made not merely with humanity but with all creation, promising that He will never again destroy the earth by flood, and charging the survivors of the flood with certain responsibilities. The *Abrahamic covenant* (12:1–3; 15:18–21; 17:1–21) which incorporates three more key words are grouped under this thematic umbrella of God's covenants.

1. *Blessing* (cf. 12:3). "Blessing" (*barak*) occurs 88 times, more than in any other biblical book (including Psalms!). The term expresses God's initial posture towards His creation; after the fall it becomes God's benevolent intent for the human race, through Abraham.
2. *Seed* (*zerang* occurs 48 times). Do not miss the irony: God promises this to an aged man whose wife is both aged and barren. God accomplishes His purposes not merely despite but through weakness (cf. Rom. 4:17).
3. *Land* (*'erets* occurs over 300 times). Many of these have to do with the creation of the earth itself or the land of Egypt. But "land" also becomes a major and explicit component of God's covenantal promises to Abraham and his seed. It's worth noting in passing that God promised a very specific land inheritance not only to Abraham's seed, but to *Abraham himself*, and to *Isaac*, and to *Jacob* (13:15, 17; 15:7; 17:8; 26:3; 28:4; 28:13; 35:12).

# Story Begins

How do we compress all this data for this part of the storyline into a self-contained theme for Genesis? Here's one suggestion: "Genesis centers on the faithfulness of God in carrying out His promises to the chosen fathers of the nation Israel (Gen. 11:27–50:26)" (Mathews, "Genesis," NDBT, 140). But you can see from the text he cites that this theme really covers only Genesis 12–50. What about the rest of it? What about the book as a whole?

Someone else has stated the theme this way: *God is at work to restore His fallen creatures*. That's certainly broader and more comprehensive, but it's also pretty generic. Restore them *from what?* And restore them *to what?* This isn't *quite* broad enough to encompass every story in the book. This theme assumes the existence of a *huge* problem that the book itself doesn't start with. In other words, this theme *begins* with chapter 3, but Genesis begins before that. Chapters 1–2 are no minor part of the story; they are where everything starts—literarily and historically, anthropologically and theologically. Any theme for Genesis has to incorporate chapters 1–2 as well. The story begins with God's creation of all things, establishing his kingdom on earth through his image-bearing human representatives/viceregents, who subsequently rebel against Him . . . creating the problem that *then* preoccupies the rest of the book—and the rest of the Book.

I would suggest the following theme for Genesis: *God the sovereign Creator granted His image-bearing human representatives dominion over His kingdom on earth; when they rebelled against Him, God graciously set about to restore humanity's right relationship to Him and the righteous dominion over creation for which they were originally formed.*

Yes, that's a lot longer, and not quite as specific regarding the second major division of the book (12–50). But it does capture the heart of this first chapter of the biblical storyline. Genesis develops its theme in a complex variety of ways, but its overall progression is simple.

- God establishes a physical extension on earth of His kingdom, creating, gifting, and equipping humans as the vice-regents over this creation-kingdom (chs. 1–2).
- Those human vice-regents abandon their submission to their Creator-King when the King's angelic arch-enemy dupes them into adopting an alternative worldview—with an indelible impact on humanity's posture toward and relationship to the King; but the King promises to establish an ongoing enmity between the Enemy (and his followers) and a portion of humanity that will ultimately overcome and defeat the Enemy (ch. 3).
- The indelible impact of sin on humanity results in an enmity between humanity and the King that becomes increasingly apparent, pervasive, and entrenched (4–11).

- God initiates the promise by which He will, through a chosen segment of humanity, restore humanity to a right relationship with Him, and to his role of dominion over this created extension of His kingdom (chs. 12–50).

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Genesis divides into two uneven parts: (1) *Primeval History* (1:1–11:26) overviews God's relationship with all humanity. (2) *Patriarchal History* (11:27–50:26) details God's relationship with a specific, chosen individual and his descendants as the channel for restoring His relationship with humanity.

## APPLICATIONS

Genesis' points of application are many and varied. On one level and in some ways, the lives of the patriarchs provide both positive and negative examples to us. For example, Abraham is noteworthy for his faith in God's long-delayed and even "impossible" promises. Joseph displays remarkable faithfulness amid unjust suffering and unshakeable confidence in God's providence.

But "Genesis is not interested in parading Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as examples of morality. Therefore it does not moralize on them. What Genesis 12–50 is doing is bringing together the promises of God to the patriarchs and the faithfulness of God in keeping those promises. . . . Genesis 12–50 is to be read as an illustration of God's faithfulness to his promises" (Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 46). The primary focus in our reading of Genesis should be, "What does this part of the biblical story teach me about God?" Here are four key things:

1. *God's words*. God's testimony in Genesis to the origin of all things is totally trustworthy (Ps. 19:7). God's words, by which He created all things, are omnipotent, effectual, and reliable—what God says is what happens. God's promises are always certain, even when circumstances make it look impossible.
2. *God's sovereignty* is demonstrated in creating, in judging His creation (the Flood), in countering human rebellion (Babel), and in choosing Abraham and his seed for the universal outworking of His plan.
3. *God's providence* intervenes in and governs over human actions (Pharaoh, Abimelech), over weather (flood, famine, famine relief), and over all our circumstances, even when we suffer unjustly (Joseph).
4. *God's plan* for human dominion over the physical creation, and for human redemption, restoring humanity's (a) relationship to Him, (b) reflection of the divine image, and (c) originally intended righteous dominion over the creation.

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

## Eight Hindrances to Answered Prayer (Conclusion)

**W**e have been doing a series on eight hindrances to answered prayer. We have looked at the first six hindrances in past issues and will finish with the last two here. The Bible is clear that if we have any of these going on in our life, our prayer life is hindered.

The first six hindrances to answered prayer are the following:

1. We don't pray (James 4:2).
2. Unconfessed, unrepentant sin (Isa. 59:1–2).
3. Not in the Word of God (Prov. 28:9).
4. Wrong motives (James 4:3).
5. Failure to forgive others (Mark 11:24–25).
6. A poor marriage relationship (1 Pet. 3:7).

### **7. VAIN OR UNTHINKING REPETITION**

The seventh hindrance to answered prayer is vain or unthinking repetition. Matthew 6:7–8 states, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” The Catholic Church often requires a penitent person to say so many Hail Marys or pray the Lord's Prayer so many times in order to be forgiven. The point of the rosary is to help a person keep count. As a student of God's Word, we would point to this passage in Matthew to prove that that kind of praying is wrong.

However, how many of us do the same thing in a different way? How many of us say the same thing before we eat every meal? We say things like “God, bless this food to my body.” What do we mean by

that? Make me fatter? Or, as Tim Hawkins says, do we mean, “Lord somehow make up for my bad choices. Please turn this Cheeto into a carrot stick on the way down”?

When we repeat the same words over and over again, in time they can become vain repetition. This could be true of the “Now I lay me down to sleep” prayer. Vain repetition is not just a Catholic problem; it is a Baptist problem as well.

If you have ever gone downhill skiing, you know that the easiest runs are marked by a green square. The next level is a blue circle, which is called “intermediate.” Then there is the black diamond, which is very challenging, and then double-black diamond, which means you may meet the Lord today. Of course, when I was a teenager, I wanted to ski double-black diamonds. In my senior year of high school I was skiing in Northern Minnesota. Due to a lack of snow, they had machines that made snow, which in this case made ice. My buddies and I went to the top of a double-black diamond, which had moguls (small hills or large bumps), on the very steep hill. The goal is to cut between each hill on your way down. I was in the lead, so I took off. I went to cut, and where there should have been snow, there was ice. So instead of cutting, I launched. The hill was so steep and ice covered, I jumped the next three moguls in a row. I was so high in the air after the third one that people looked small. Picture ski jumping in the Winter Olympics with the wrong equipment. I crashed, and my skis and poles went everywhere.

I started just walking down the slope, and my buddies skied up to me and asked

what I was doing. I said, “Did I wipe out or what?”

They said, “Wow, crazy wipe out!”

I got my gear and skied to the bottom and again asked, “Did I wipe out or what?”

“Yes, Jim crazy wipe out.”

Halfway up the ski lift I asked again, “Did I wipe out or what?”

“Yes, Jim crazy wipe out.” At the top of the lift, I asked the same question with the same tone of voice for the fourth time. My buddies said, “Let's go see ski patrol.” I was diagnosed as having a second-degree concussion. It took two days for my memory to come back. When I said the same thing in the same tone of voice, everyone around me knew that something was wrong. Yet many do the same thing and call it prayer. God calls that vain repetition, and it hinders our prayer life.

### **8. LACK OF FAITH**

The last hindrance to answered prayer is a lack of faith. James 1:5–8 states,

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that without faith it is impossible to please God. When you come to God in prayer, you must come believing that He has the ability and desire to answer your prayer. Often a lack of faith leads to a lack of prayer, which was our first point. If you are not reading your Bible, you won't know if your requests line up with what God wants, which was point number three. Faith always starts small



## Failures Aren't Finished

Continued from page 24

placed between the two pillars that held up the building. Then Samson asked the Lord to let him die and used his renewed strength to bring down the building. As a leader in Israel, he accomplished more on his last day than he had in twenty years of ministry. And so, we can see that fickle failures are not finished.

### THOMAS CRANMER

Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, was one of the leading voices preaching the true gospel in England. Mary, the new queen, hated him for proclaiming God's truth. With other godly leaders, Cranmer used the Scriptures to confront the heresies of the day. Since he was the leader, the forces of evil targeted him. He was sentenced to three years of hard imprisonment for his preaching.

Then the enemies of the gospel chose a different approach—offering to reward him with his freedom if he would turn his back on the gospel. As John Foxe wrote, “When Satan finds the Christian proof against one mode of attack, he tries another; and what form is so seductive as smiles, rewards, and power, after a long, painful imprisonment?”<sup>8</sup> After wearing the weary Cranmer down, his enemies deceitfully “promised him his former greatness if he would but recant, as well as the queen's favor, and this at the very time they knew that his death was determined in council.”<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Cranmer made the excruciating choice to recant—to turn his back on the gospel he preached. He signed a statement stating that he did “renounce, abhor, and detest all manner of heresies and errors of Luther and Zuinglius [Zwingli], and all other teachings which are contrary to sound and true doctrine.”<sup>10</sup>

But this was not enough for Cranmer's enemies. They hounded him into signing five more recantations. But even that was not enough for Queen Mary. She hated Cranmer and ordered that he be burned at the stake—after he preached a message confessing his sins. And what a message he preached! Facing certain death and desiring to have a clear conscience, Cranmer confessed his sins. And the chief sin that he confessed was

that he had wearily signed those false statements authored by his adversaries. He concluded his preaching by saying,

And now I come to the great thing which so much troubles my conscience, more than any thing that ever I did or said in my whole life, and that is the setting abroad of a writing contrary to the truth, which now here I renounce and refuse, as things written with my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, and to save my life, if it might be; and that is, all such bills or papers which I have written or signed with my hand since my degradation, wherein I have written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand has offended, writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for when I come to the fire, it shall first be burned.<sup>11</sup>

His preaching enraged the enemies of the gospel. They tied him to a stake and set the brush pile below him afire. As the flames rose, he thrust his right hand into the fire and repeated, “Unworthy right hand, unworthy right hand.”

Many would say that courageous Cranmer was a more powerful witness at the end of his life than he had ever been before. And regardless of our regrets, we now know that fickle failures aren't finished.

**Gordon Dickson** has served as a pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, since 1994.



<sup>1</sup> Judges 13:1–5.

<sup>2</sup> Judges 16:20.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:9.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 2:6–9.

<sup>5</sup> See Judges 16:16.

<sup>6</sup> Micah 7:8.

<sup>7</sup> Judges 16:28–30.

<sup>8</sup> John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Project Gutenberg (<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22400/pg22400-images.html>), 241.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 244.

and grows. The more you see God work, the more confident you are to ask for more.

James also tells us the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. In other words, a half-hearted “maybe God can, maybe He can't” prayer hinders your prayer life. However, when you pour your heart out to God in passionate, fervent prayer, believing God can answer and desires to answer, then you will get to see what God can do. The sad reality is that too many Christians are satisfied with seeing what they can do. In my opinion, they have settled for less, and they are missing out. We have the same God who answered Abraham's servant when looking for Rachel, who answered Elijah's prayer that it not rain for three years and six months, and then answered when he prayed for rain. God can do what we could never do. Do we pray like it? Do we believe that? Oh, may we desire to pray like those who prayed Peter out of jail.

There is much the Bible teaches about prayer, but these are eight things the Bible tells us will hinder our prayer life. May prayer become a vital part of all our Christian lives.

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



# Regional Report

## SOUTH REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Malinda Duvall

Combine the organizational skills of Tony Facenda and his wife, Karen, and the graciousness of Pastor Doug Wright and his wife, Kristy, with the beautiful setting of Keystone Baptist Church in Berryville, Virginia, and the result will unquestionably be a refreshing time of fellowship and encouragement! And that's exactly what we had at our recent South Regional Fellowship on March 6-7.

Keynote speakers Carl Herbster and Todd Sivnksty covered our theme "Living in the Moment" (Eph. 5:15-16). Our workshops covered a wide range of topics: "Slaying the Dragons of Difficulties," "One-on-One Evangelism," "The Beauty of a Content Woman," "Dealing with Discouragement," and a "Ministry Swap Shop," among others. Evangelist Matt Galvin had breakout sessions for the teens.

Eating all our meals together at the church lent itself to wonderful fellowship. A lot of emphasis was put on the fact that the FBFI South is for the whole family and the whole church. With sessions for ladies and ministries for children, anyone of any age can benefit from the fellowship. If you know FBFI Coordinator Tony Facenda, you can hear him saying, "Next year's FBFI South Regional Fellowship is only 358 days, 43 minutes and 30 seconds away on March 11-13, 2024, at Catawba Springs Baptist Church, Apex, North Carolina." All are invited.



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## A Report from the Streets

Each FBI chaplain is asked to complete our basics curriculum as part of his endorsement. The first module begins with these reminders: “We live in a world that has been broken by sin. The impact of sin can be seen and felt all around us. ‘The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now’ (Rom. 8:22), and this reality necessitates that men and women have special training to counter sin’s effects and protect human life. Police and firefighters, prison staff, healthcare workers, and many other professionals work tirelessly to prevent death. Sadly, their work can only slow the problem, not solve it. God is sending community chaplains from Bible-believing churches into these high-risk areas to bring the message of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Just as the Apostle Paul acclimated himself to different and often difficult environments to share the gospel (1 Cor. 9:22), so also today’s community chaplains must prepare themselves and be willing to do the same.”

Most folks in our churches are aware there is a significant problem with lawlessness in America’s cities. Although they read news reports and hear an occasional siren, they are limited in understanding how fragile the peace really is if it were not for men and women in law enforcement who make up the “thin blue line.”<sup>1</sup> Assisting officers across the country are Bible-believing chaplains, like those endorsed by the FBFI, who understand that Jesus alone can transform shattered lives and bring tranquility to hearts that have seen the unimaginable. The purpose of this article is to encourage you with firsthand accounts of “the power of God unto salvation” in the city where I have served as a police chaplain for the past nine years.

### TJ MEYERS

First, let me introduce you to TJ, who served our department for twenty-eight years, rising to the rank of sergeant. One of his first calls alone as a rookie was to a home where an eight-year-old boy found his father’s shotgun in a closet, aimed it at his seven-year-old sister’s chest, and pulled the trigger. TJ’s lifesaving efforts were too late. This would be just the beginning of nearly three decades of responding to human carnage, which ultimately led to his early retirement. The scars from what he saw as a cop were deeper than anyone realized. God placed me in TJ’s patrol car right after I joined the department, and I soon learned that his circumstances had brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Late on a Saturday evening he called and asked me to help him with a death notification.<sup>2</sup> He was supervising a scene where a drunk driver had struck and killed a man crossing a street. TJ did not know the victim, but when he reached into his pocket to find identification, he pulled out a police badge. The off-duty officer was one of our own. I put on my uniform and waited for TJ to pick me up. We drove across town that night to deliver the tragic news to a new widow and a young son who no longer had a father.

I did not know it at the time, but something happened in TJ’s mind that night. Years of post-traumatic stress changed my friend. However, God allowed this police chaplain to spend significant time with TJ. We golfed, fished, and discussed biblical answers to the thoughts that plagued him. He and his wife enrolled in our church’s Grief Share<sup>3</sup> ministry and began attending services. Both of their lives changed dramatically as the Lord restored hope, and this spring I had the privilege of baptizing TJ.

### CATRINA

Next, meet a woman named Katrina. One morning, while I was riding with the police, we were dispatched to a domestic disturbance. We soon learned a boyfriend (the homeowner) was evicting his old girlfriend to make room for his new one. The situation broke my heart. As we escorted the woman off the property, I handed her my department-issued police card and said, “I’m a chaplain, and I also pastor a church near here. Please call me if you would like help.”

Two days later my phone rang, and Katrina wanted to meet. She shared through tears how her journey had led from an abusive home to the Army. After a medical discharge, she had bounced from one abusive relationship to another.

I shared with her the good news of Christ’s love and forgiveness and the fact



Sgt. TJ Meyers, Chaplain Ascher, and service dog Zest.

that our meeting just days before was really a divine appointment. Catrina opened her heart to the Lord and was gloriously saved. She has since been disciplined, and before her baptism she told the whole church that it was through a police call she came to know Jesus Christ as her Savior. By the way, I have continued to share the gospel with the police officer who was

with me on the domestic call that introduced us to Catrina. He knows her life has been transformed and that she is faithfully attending our church.

### WALMART TRAGEDY

On Tuesday night, November 22, 2022, a thirty-one-year-old Walmart employee killed seven people in our city and wounded four others. Along with responding officers were several police chaplains, including Pastor Don Karnes, who is an FBFI-endorsed chaplain. (I was out of town for the Thanksgiving holiday and could not respond.) As our chaplain corps ministered to officers and families throughout the night, Don and I were thankful that the Lord had allowed us to train many of the chaplains who were on scene. God continues to remind me and our church family that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). When you hear the reports of civil disturbances and

mass shootings, remember this report from the streets. Christ is building His church, and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

**Mike Ascher** is the senior pastor of Good News Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Virginia, and has been a police chaplain for twenty-five years. He also serves as chairman of the Chaplain Commission for the FBFI.



Praying at the law-enforcement memorial service in Chesapeake.

<sup>1</sup> Police Chief William H. Parker of the Los Angeles Police Department is credited with creating the expression “thin blue line,” which referenced police across the country who “[struggle] valiantly to protect civilized society from godless communists, murderous thugs and the widespread dangers and decay of modern urban life” (David Shaw, “Chief Parker Molded LAPD Image—Then Came the ‘60s...,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1992, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/177428009/>).

<sup>2</sup> Death notifications and Dead on Arrival (DOA) calls are one of the primary ways police chaplains assist officers and the public. God’s grace is needed as we deliver the worst news an individual or family will ever hear.

<sup>3</sup> Griefshare.org

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## Spiritual Desires for God's People

The dictionary defines "desire" this way: "To set one's heart upon, aspire to, require, prefer." As far as the world is concerned, desires can be twisted, perverted, and lustful, with devastating results that bring shame, disgrace, and heartbreak. As Proverbs 14:13 says, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." However, for a born-again believer, "desire" is defined in the Cruden's *Concordance* as "the prayer request or longing of the soul, for some spiritual or bodily good thing, whereof it feels a want." Psalm 21:2 declares, "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips." Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Psalm 145:19 voices, "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them."

I now want to address some desires that every child of God should strive to have in his journey through this life. Of course, I can't address all of them, but I want to focus on three main desires we should have in our lives.

First, we ought to desire to dedicate ourselves to the Lord. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." I can look back to a definite time when I gave my life for the Lord's use and service. That was my heart's desire, and I have never regretted my decision. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:26, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." If you have never dedicated your life to the Lord, I trust that you will pause right now and

voice to Him, as Abraham did in Genesis 22:11, "Here am I."

Second, we ought to desire to help other believers grow in Christ. We read in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." I like how Dr. Harry Ironside voiced this truth in his book on Galatians. He wrote on page 220,

Are we ever on the watch for such opportunities to manifest the goodness of God to those with whom we come in contact, and thus magnify the Lord, whose we are and whom we serve? Having been so wondrously dealt with ourselves, how can we do other than seek to exemplify in our dealings with others the lovingkindness which has been shown toward us?

When we look back and recall how others have helped us to grow in the Lord, it ought to move our hearts to do the same for others. To whom are you showing lovingkindness? How much time, instruction, and financial or physical aid are you devoting to help fellow believers? Galatians 6:2 exhorts, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Also, we read the admonition in Acts 20:35, "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Third, we ought to desire to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ to the lost. The apostle Paul said in Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Paul's desire

was so intense that he said in Romans 9:3, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Paul's passionate desire to witness to the lost should stir and motivate us into actively pursuing lost souls for Christ, especially since we know that the time to proclaim the gospel is now, not later. Look at what Jesus Himself said in John 4:35: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." The Lord wants us to work faithfully in taking the gospel to the unsaved. And when we do so, the Lord will reward us eternally! Our Lord said in John 4:36, "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." Psalm 126:6 says, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." The Lord also said in Luke 15:7, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." There is one joy not only in heaven but here as well. It always thrills my heart when I see a person I have witnessed to come to the Lord. May all of us be involved in pointing the unsaved to Christ; and may we never lose our desire to proclaim our Savior to the lost.

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