

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



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Our sincere thanks to David Shumate for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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A.I.

Old-School, High-Tech

In 1958 my dad bought a Volkswagen Beetle. If you looked up “basic transportation” in the dictionary, I am sure you would find its picture. That year’s model didn’t even have a gas gauge. When it started to sputter and cough you would flip a lever in the firewall with your foot to engage the reserve fuel supply. However, a few years after getting the “Bug,” my dad installed a short-wave radio. This homemade amalgamation of practical car and electronic gadget embodied

my father's approach to technology. Let's call it old-school, high-tech.

I think "old-school, high-tech" helps us think about the new world of artificial intelligence (AI). It's not that we should allow our thinking to be controlled by tradition or by novelty. Rather, we should recognize that God is both timeless and timely. On the one hand, the principles in His Word are permanent, and we must stand firmly upon them. On the other hand, we must have the wisdom to apply these timeless truths to our changing environment.

AI is rapidly becoming commonplace, whether on our phones, in our Bible-study software, or reflected in the ads we see. AI may be the newest thing, but it is only one in a galaxy of life-altering technologies with which we interact constantly. To orient us to this reality, Erik Hanson provides a helpful introduction to a biblical view of technology.

In November 2022, AI burst into public consciousness with ChatGPT. For the first time the average person could talk to a computer using human language. Generative AI

models like ChatGPT respond in ways that seem remarkably human. How should believers think about this, and what are the ethics of interacting with AI? Michael Riley presents a theological framework for these questions in his thought-provoking essay, “In Our Image and Likeness.”

Because AI is so widely available, many are experimenting to discover what it can do. Mike and Lisa Redick are a missionary couple who are enthusiastic about this new technology. Lisa gives us a fascinating account of how AI is multiplying their Great Commission effort.

Despite its potential, AI also engenders fear. What does AI portend for employment, social interaction, and civil liberties? In his article, “Who’s Afraid of AI?,” Erik Hanson helpfully reminds us to deal biblically with our fears and think objectively and soberly about this technology.

We also must be alert to the way technology affects the way we minister. Scott Olson

observes that, for all the benefits of technology, we are never relieved of our privilege and responsibility of being truly present with others.

One area of both optimism and concern is AI's effect on education. AI undeniably has great potential to enhance the educational experience through means such as AI-assisted research, AI tutors, and AI-created simulations. As an example of such an educational application, we have included a simulated interview with an AI model playing the role of C. H. Spurgeon. After the "interview," I make some observations about the benefits and limits of such an exercise.

AI also challenges how we educate. It has become so proficient at processing human language that it undermines how we measure our students' knowledge and reasoning, whether through tests or written assignments. This concern motivated David Huffstutler to contribute "Does Homework Have to be Human?" Finally, we have made a glossary of

AI-related terms available as a reference on our Proclaim and Defend site.

Like all technology, AI is a gift of God, who provides us with resources and the ingenuity to use them. However, all technological advances are influenced by human sin and the curse it brought. It is our desire that this issue will help believers respond wisely to the high-tech world in which God has allowed us to serve.

On a final note, this issue debuts a new column: “Stewardship Matters.” We welcome Corey Pfaffe, CEO of MinistryCPA, as our newest *FrontLine* columnist, and we look forward to his teaching on financial stewardship.

David Shumate, Associate Editor

Erik D. Hanson



Developing a Biblical Perspective on Technology

Today, technology permeates culture and plays an important part in daily life. We encounter it in many areas: home, education, business, government, and church life. The word *technology* originates from the Greek word *technē* and conveys the idea of craft, art, or knowledge. The Greeks used this term to express innovation and creativity in the physical world that benefits humanity. Technology is a culturally common and multifaceted word for both mundane and sophisticated creations and inventions. Respected

teacher and author Tony Reinke writes, “*Technology* is now a household term for all the tools we wield.”¹

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

In Genesis 1–11, God provides a biblical foundation of technology by giving specific examples of technological development, including language, clothing, cities, and large structures. God allows for technological advancement, which coincides with cultural identity and growth. This indicates that technology is not limited to human invention but is a divine gift to mankind imbued with moral qualities. As Christians who desire to glorify God through technology, we must build a biblical theology of technology to understand its cultural, moral, and theological implications and applications for today.

HUMAN CULTURE

Understanding technology requires a consideration of culture. When God created man-

kind, He also created culture since “culture happens when humans interact with the world.”² Anthropologists have taught that culture is a set of practices and beliefs that identify a group of people. More recently, cultural anthropologist Raymond Williams gave three general definitions of culture, which include “intellectual/spiritual/aesthetic development,” “a particular way of life,” and “artistic activity.”³ Thus, culture is unequivocally connected with mankind and gives a distinct identification to individuals, families, organizations, regions, and nations. After the Fall, man retains the image of God, but that image is marred. Therefore, human culture has morally good and bad aspects (Gen. 1:27–28; 1 John 2:15–17).

TECHNOLOGY'S RELATIONSHIP TO CULTURE

Technology's relationship to culture can be seen in the early chapters of Genesis. According to Genesis 1:26–27, God made man in His image. This implies that God

desires man to have a relationship with Him. It also indicates that God gave man the intellect to make choices that display His nature. Considering this, God commanded man to fill and rule over the earth (Gen. 1:28). In addition to propagation, God intends man to create products of human culture as he cultivates and tends the earth, which includes developing technology. For Adam, technology was involved in caring for the vegetation and ruling over the animals, including naming them (Gen. 1:28–29; 2:19–20). After the fall, Adam and Eve made clothing (Gen. 3:7), which communicates culturally to this day. In Genesis 11, God's confounding of languages at Babel led to cultural development and diversity as mankind scattered throughout the earth (Gen. 11:7–9).

MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology has moral significance. Due to man's fall, sin entered the world (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12). As a result of sin, the image

of God was marred, and God cursed man's cultivation of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19). Cultivating the ground can be thought of as human innovation. And such innovation “always results in an embedding of values and meaning into the things we make,”⁴ making technology itself moral. Due to the Fall and the curse, man's work, including technology, is faulty. Like any human creation or innovation, technology “can be directed for good, but it remains fallen and limited.”⁵ Despite its imperfections, technology should be used to reflect God's image accurately and to counter sin's effects as much as possible.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF TECHNOLOGY

Genesis 1–11 gives examples of significant human technological innovations and achievements that have changed the world. First, Adam named “every living creature,” impacting how animals are identified today (2:19–20). Second, Adam and Eve “sewed fig leaves together,” making the first articles of

clothing (3:7). Later, God updated their clothing with better durability and comfort (3:21). Third, banished away from God's presence as a fugitive for murdering Abel, Cain built the first city, which he named Enoch after his son (4:17). As a result, the first industrial revolution began with the cultivation of three distinct areas: farming, music/art, and metalwork. This industrial revolution would eventually develop and grow the world's economy. Cain's grandchildren, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain, each discovered and contributed to these aspects of technological advancement (4:20–22). Fourth, God commanded Noah to build an ark and gave him specific guidance for the project (6:14–16). Even though it had not rained upon the earth, making such a structure unprecedented and seemingly unnecessary, Noah did "according to all that God commanded him" (6:22). Fifth, God describes Nimrod as a mighty warrior, likely indicating his militaristic innovation and desire to conquer the known world (10:8–9).

Further, Nimrod founded and developed significant cities such as Babylon, Erech, Accad, Calneh, Assyria, Nineveh, and Calah (10:10–12). Lastly, mankind came together to build the city and tower of Babel, “whose top may reach unto heaven,” indicating a structure constructed with great height (11:4, 9a).

RELATIONSHIP OF TECHNOLOGY TO SIN OR EVIL

These examples of technology have theological implications. Interestingly, in all these incidences except the naming of the animals, sin either resulted in or accompanied technological accomplishment. God brought His judgment due to man’s sin. However, He also demonstrated His mercy and goodness amid sin’s consequences by giving mankind the gifts of clothing, cities, industry, architecture, aesthetics, languages, and cultural diversity. In addition, after man’s fall, God promised redemption (Gen. 3:15). Amid worldwide wickedness, He demonstrated redemption by

delivering Noah's family from His judgment through the construction and use of technology (Gen. 6:17–18). This indicates that although the motive, association, and purpose of the technology may be evil, God can still use it for our good and His glory (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28–29).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY USE

These theological implications necessitate and encourage practical applications for believers who use computer technology. First, prove “what is acceptable unto the Lord” by properly examining God's Word to develop standards in the use of technology (Eph. 5:10). Second, study the technology in question (1 Thess. 5:21). To prove what is acceptable and good requires a proper understanding of the technology's nature, communication, and purpose. While the technological item does not need to be exclusively sacred in its association, pur-

pose, and use, God commands believers to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21) and to do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Third, consider your motivation in using technology. God desires “clean hands” (right actions) and a “pure heart” (right attitude) (Ps. 24:4). Fourth, consider how you use the technology. Although it might not be morally evil, it might not be beneficial or wise (1 Cor. 10:23). You must follow Christ’s commands of love, graciousness, and kindness when posting or commenting on social media (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 4:31–32). Fifth, be careful about the time you dedicate to technological activity (Eph. 5:16). Studies indicate that some technology can be addictive, which could lead to health issues and misplaced values.⁶ Further, believers should not be obsessed with technology or make it an idol (Exod. 20:3; Col. 1:18c). Lastly, as God’s image-bearer, seek to glorify Him in your technological choices, use, and communication (1 Cor. 10:31).

GLORIFY GOD THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

To glorify God through technology, believers should develop a biblical perspective on technology. This requires a meticulous biblical study of technology, including its cultural, moral, and theological implications and applications. Amid many technological innovations, changes, and even fears, God intends for man to enjoy His gift of technology in the 21st century (Ecc. 3:11–13). By your use of technology, declare God’s greatness. “For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised” (Ps. 96:4).

Erik D. Hanson has served in pastoral ministry in Pennsylvania and New Jersey for fifteen years.



¹ Tony Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* (Crossway, 2022), 17.

² Jeff Myers, *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement* (Summit Ministries, 2017), 62.

³ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2021), 1–2.

⁴ John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Place of*

Technology in the Story of God, 2nd ed. (Kregel, 2022), 97.

⁵ Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology* (InterVarsity Press, 2013), 70.

⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Technology Addictions: Social Media, Online Gaming, and More*, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/technology-addictions-social-media-and-more>.

FROM *the* CALL TO *the* FIELD



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Michael Riley

In Our Image and Likeness

Should you thank Siri?

While the current marketing hype over AI has to recede at some point—can *every* consumer product need AI?—its widespread adoption makes it unlikely that any of us will be able to avoid interacting with AI-powered computers.

There is no universally accepted definition of *artificial intelligence*. What I have in view for this essay are chiefly large language models (like ChatGPT and Google's Gemini) and

other advanced chat AIs (like Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa). We are supposed to interact with these tools, both in our inputs and their responses, in natural language. Regardless of the particular technologies powering these artificial intelligences, interactions with such tools can sometimes *feel* like an ordinary human conversation.

The AI boom raises a number of ethical questions. On the development side, there are serious concerns that an AI might act in ways that satisfy its programmed parameters yet are contrary to the interests of the humans that programmed it. That is no small risk.

Here, though, my focus is on the user side of AI. As Christians, how should we think about talking to—or, seemingly, talking *with*—our computers? Do we have any obligations to engage with them respectfully? Is berating Alexa for a useless answer a sin?

I contend that the relevant theological concept for our decisions is *image-bearing*.

THE CENTRALITY OF IMAGE-BEARING

Because man is made in the image of the Creator, we are the crown of creation. There is a long and ongoing debate about the specific meaning of “in his own image, in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27). It is a debate we do not have to resolve here. Whether we regard the image as constitutive (*what we are*) or functional (*what we do*), what matters is that we have this unique status: in a manner unlike anything else in the created world, we are like God.

We are like God—and yet when the serpent comes to Eve, his temptation is that by eating the fruit she will be “like God” (ESV, likely more to the point than the KJV’s “as gods”). Why does he offer her something that she already has? There is a necessary distinction here. By virtue of God’s creative pleasure, we have a likeness to God that is displayed as we *reflect* His mind and character in *submission* to that which we see in Him. But in the Fall, Adam presumes to be like God as the author-

ity, the one who *determines* what is good and evil. Adam and Eve aspire to be *like God* in an ultimate way, rather than in a secondary and derivative way. This transgression of the proper boundaries of image-bearing is the essence of sin. And it establishes a theme we see throughout Scripture.

That we do bear the image of God is undoubtedly the ground of our ethical obligations to one another. When God forbids murder, He does so because it is an attack on God: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:6). James rebukes us that with our tongues “bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God” (James 3:9).

C. S. Lewis’s essay *The Weight of Glory* unveils the staggering implications of our being like God:

It is a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you

talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

There are no ordinary people.

You have never talked to a mere mortal.

We indeed have this weight of glory. But we must never forget that it is a derived glory. It is a gift bestowed on us from the One who has all glory in Himself.

The ethical implications of our being image-bearers are bounded by a proper emphasis on both *image* and *bearers*. Because we do in fact *bear* God's image, we must treat one another with proper esteem. But because we are only *image*-bearers and not God himself, we must not exalt any man (including ourselves!) to the level of God. We must neither demean others nor deify them. To demean them is to insult the One whose

image they bear. To deify them, though, is to diminish the Creator/creature distinction.

MADE IN OUR IMAGE

As God's image-bearers, it should be no surprise that we are, like our God, image-bearer makers. We do this in the greatest way in our children. From the beginning, this was so: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth" (Gen. 5:3).

But there are secondary, subordinate senses in which we make things in our image. We can do so materially by making literal images of ourselves, and we can do so by humanizing other nonhuman entities.

If I show you a picture of my mother and then you spit on that picture, you and I are going to have issues. And that conflict will not be eliminated by your claim that you didn't actually spit on my mother. I accept that claim, but your spitting on her image is

enough of an indignity that I have some duty to defend her honor. We recognize that those things that bear our image merit some level of respect. To defile an image is to cast scorn on the one whose image it bears.

People have realized this for years: burning or hanging leaders in effigy is a long-standing tradition. Such disdain for an image need not even be directed at a particular person. Consider whether it would trouble you, for instance, to find that your neighbor has a basement full of mannequins that he slashes, burns, hangs, and impales, not for personal defense training, but merely because he finds it amusing. On the other extreme, a person who keeps a doll as though it were an actual baby might, in certain circumstances, elicit our sympathy. And yet we must recognize that such an action is disordered. It fails to maintain the profound distinction between us and those things that merely bear our image.

The same is true, I contend, for animals. Scripture contains dozens of passages in which animals are used as paradigms of human virtues and vices: the folly of the ostrich (Job 39:17), the industriousness of the ant (Prov. 6:6–8), the wisdom of a serpent and harmlessness of a dove (Matt. 10:16), and the sheep's proneness to wander (Isa. 53:6). Following Scripture's example, we find it easy to see our likeness reflected in animals. There is justification for our natural intuition that crushing an ant and crushing a puppy are not the same: it is far easier for us to project a variety of our human characteristics onto the puppy.

For this reason, “a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast” (Prov. 12:10). When Nathan wants to confront David with his sin, he tells the story of a poor man who “had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own

cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter” (2 Sam. 12:3). The viciousness of his wealthy neighbor in treating this man’s lamb *merely* as a lamb sets the trap to incite David’s righteous wrath.

We have seen that because man is made in the image of God, all people should be treated with dignity, yet without deification. In parallel to this: those things that we make in our image also should enjoy a kind of derived dignity, but they must never be regarded as the equals of humanity. We should not torture animals, nor should we elevate them to our level.

APPLICATION OF IMAGE-BEARING TO AI

Artificial intelligences are made in our image. As the computers we interact with become increasingly like us, I suggest that image-bearing is a theological concept that must be given significant weight in making ethical decisions. Because we have purposefully created these machines in our likeness,

our interactions with them should generally be respectful. At the same time, we must maintain (I suspect, quite counter-culturally) that these “intelligences” are ultimately no such thing at all—we must ardently defend the distinction between ourselves as image-bearers of God and those things, no matter how seemingly competent, that we have made in our image.

This will be difficult: we are already interacting with simulated persons who have almost instantaneous access and recall of seemingly infinite stores of information. In the same way that animal rights defenders periodically seek to get animals recognized as legal persons, there will be secular ethicists who insist that a well-functioning AI has greater claim to be considered a person than does an infant. To whatever degree their argument seems to succeed, we should take it as evidence of the bankruptcy of secularism. That they can build a defensible argument for

such a monstrosity on their worldview is not a good reason to accept the argument; it is a good reason to think that their worldview is corrupt to its foundations.

To move the discussion in a slightly different (but related) direction: we should refrain from gratuitous violence in video games, not because it might hypothetically induce us to commit violence in real life, but because violence against images of us, merely for entertainment, is not much different from the guy who tortures mannequins. The act in itself is an expression of disorder, whether or not it provokes violence against an actual person.

At the same time, the suggestion that we ought to have AI friends (whether text-based or, eventually, as AI robots) should make us extremely wary. Apps that are built to facilitate deep relationships between people and artificial minds ought to be condemned. If the days arise here (as they have in Japan) in which the elderly or infirm are cared for by robots,

we should lament rather than celebrate the replacement of ordinary human relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

The Bible remains our sufficient source for all faith and practice. We are not surprised to find that the Bible does not mention artificial intelligence. But we should equally be unsurprised that God's Word provides us the theological structure to make faithful decisions in contemporary circumstances.

We have here hardly hinted at answers to all the ethical questions that accompany the new ubiquity of AI interactions. My hope has been more modest: to help us understand that while the *specific* issue of artificial intelligence might be new, it is merely an application of a well-established Christian teaching.

Michael P. Riley is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Wakefield, Michigan.





Lisa Redick

Using AI to Carry Out the Great Commission

It's been a long time since that Saturday afternoon TV show introduced me, a seven-year-old girl, to the idea of artificial intelligence. Normally, the matinee was a rerun of Roy Rogers, riding off into the sunset singing "Happy Trails" after he had saved the West—an allusion that I realize is probably lost to many of our readers. That is, however, inconsequential due to the fact that Roy was preempted that day anyway and replaced with an inappropriately cheesy sci-fi short.

The antagonist was terrifyingly portrayed

as an evil robot from space. In that scenario, aliens came with the robots (artificial intelligence) from a faraway planet and quickly dominated and destroyed humanity. Just as the doomsday clock was winding down, my dad, who had been outside the window all that time prepping his brand-new gas lawn mower, let the cord rip. With a roar and one little push, the mower shot a small rock right through the living room window where I was sitting. Thinking it was an attack, I shot out of there like a rocket. The ensuing conversation between my parents had to do with keeping a closer eye on the television and how we all needed to be outside checking the lawn for rocks anyway. I never forgot. Skipping forward to today, while sci-fi has surprisingly enough become a big box-office hit, the world is still waiting for the aliens! And even though AI has become the “great assistant” in many aspects of everyday life, some still believe we are only moments away from an uprising that will ultimately destroy humanity.

Frankly, I'm not seeing it that way, and I hope you aren't either. The short I saw as a child, and the many films since, have done what filmmakers have always done: fed our fears for entertainment's sake or to advance an agenda. However, AI is just a tool. It is powerful and suddenly ever-present, but still just a tool that can be used for good or evil just like your phone, my husband's computer, or a Google search.

AI is real. It's accessible. And what it comes down to is making the effort to learn how to use it. In my case, I spent thirty minutes to an hour a day for over a year learning and testing sites and apps to see if there were ways AI could serve the ministry. I found that there certainly were. The capabilities and features of AI change so quickly that I am still trying it out as often as possible! Here are just a few of the uses I have found.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Because of our work in developing and restricted-access nations, we have created

independent businesses that provide revenue for the ministries. These have included a call center, a school, an event center, several bakeries, a catering company, and two (soon to be three) small hotels. These businesses support the ministry by providing income that is used to further the gospel. We build buildings; provide medical care; support workers, widows, and orphans; and hold training conferences, church services, and evangelistic crusades. You can imagine that running such a diverse list of businesses and ministries requires a great deal of administration! We faced the prospect of hiring several professionals to assist us with legal and human resource questions—potentially defeating the purpose of income generation. Instead, we employed ChatGPT to create human resource documents, contracts, policies, and standard operating procedures. This is an example of how we did it. You can do it too! Start with the first prompt.

1. You must tell ChatGPT (or whatever AI-powered chatbot you are using) what role it is playing for you. In my case, I might say, “You are a top-of-the-line HR consultant in [specify country] specializing in the laws and ordinances necessary for conducting business and employment.”
2. You must tell the chatbot what you want. For instance, I could make this request: “Create an HR policy for short-term or long-term use of a corporate vehicle including sign-out sheets and an employee agreement that will call employees to accountability.”
3. You must tell the chatbot who your target audience is—for example, “The policy is for dedicated employees who want to understand their roles, privileges, and responsibilities in the company.”

The more detailed the prompt, the more accurate and usable the output will be. Think of your current to-do list. Are there ways AI could help?

NOT JUST TRANSLATION

The collaborations and partnerships divinely orchestrated over the past thirty-five years have definitely been a key to much growth and victory. This is especially true regarding my husband Mike and his longtime ministry partner, an amazing Singaporean man named Paul Choo. During COVID-19 in January 2022, together with an amazing team, they took an existing training platform and transformed it into a powerful two-year, totally online, completely legitimate Master of Ministry degree program for Asians—all for free. It's a practical degree meant for leaders and currently delivered in English. Seemingly in the blink of an eye over a thousand students from thirty countries enrolled. In two short years the first graduating class walked a physical and virtual aisle.

The growth and success in mentoring leaders into greater usability has been phe-

nomenal. But what about all the non-English speakers? Because of the contacts the team had, we had an open door in another restricted-access nation containing millions. Our problem was how to get people to translate all the courses in a timely manner! The team studied and learned how to use AI. The AI translator they used not only takes the lessons and translates them, but it also recreates the voice of the speaker and even adjusts the movement of his mouth. The translation is almost flawless and needs only a person conversant in the target language to listen and correct any mistakes. The right prompts make the output more accurate—for example, telling the AI it is playing the role of a Bible teacher communicating accurately from the Bible as the benchmark. What could have taken years is done in hours, and we can move on to other languages! This example only scratches the surface of the possibilities.

WHEN YOU CAN'T WAIT

A 2021 military coup in Myanmar left horror and tragedy that are still playing out in its streets. After the first year, it was clear that one of the most damaging losses was going to be education. No school was open to attend. Students began to deteriorate, melting into bad habits. This need and the desire to reach them with the gospel led us to join together with our lifetime partner T. M. to start Elpis Education Academy. Elpis is a Christian-based day school open to all who apply. Although the effort has been valiant, we still have much to learn, and we must continue to prepare thirty-four staff members, most of whom have other jobs teaching as many as 890 students from preschool to ninth grade.

We needed to cut the learning curve for the teachers. This year I had the privilege of holding our first AI training seminar in Myanmar, introducing tools that could help to do just that. The tools available to teachers help them

create lesson plans and PowerPoint presentations, scale materials to different grade levels, identify plagiarism, create interactive lessons with historical figures, use a live interactive tutorial to teach math concepts, and prepare gospel videos—all in a matter of seconds. Some of my favorite apps are www.eduaide.ai, www.app.diffit.me, www.zerogpt.com, and www.briskteaching.com, but these are only some of the massive list of helpful tools I have found.

A FINAL THOUGHT

In our ministries, we collaborate with universities in difficult-access nations of the

**THE AI TRANSLATOR THEY USED
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world to further the gospel. Our initial goal is that every person would come to know a Christian. When we pitch the plan to the universities, one of the things we say is that English will not solve the injustices of the world, but it is definitely a key in one's pocket to open otherwise closed doors of opportunity—doors to relationships, jobs, knowledge, and more. That's what learning to use AI is: an opportunity to open otherwise closed doors.

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AI is an opportunity, and it's real. It's available. And it comes down to being willing to make the effort to learn to use it. I hope you will. Please feel free to visit our new blog, *neveroutofthefight.online*, and we can talk about it and lots more.

Lisa Redick is the co-founder and managing director of Impact Global Outreach and Global Collaboration for Community Empowerment. She and her husband Mike have lived and served the Lord in gospel ministry in southeast Asia since 1990, passionately seeking those who have never heard the gospel.





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David Shumate

An A.I. “Interview” with C. H. Spurgeon

This “interview” is excerpted from a chat session with Anthropic’s Claude 3.5 Sonnet, and some observations about the process follow the excerpts. The session was initiated by the following prompt and Claude’s response:

Prompt: “Assume the role of the famous 19th-century English pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I would like to interview you. Are you ready?”

Response: “As Charles Haddon Spurgeon, I stand ready to engage in this interview. My life has been dedicated to preaching the gospel and shepherding

the flock of Christ. I pray that our discourse may be edifying and glorifying to God. How may I assist you today?”

FrontLine: *Pastor Spurgeon, can you please tell us how you were saved?*

A.I. Spurgeon: Ah, my conversion. . . . It is a story I never tire of telling, for it shows the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was in January of 1850, when I was but a lad of 15 years. I had been under great conviction of sin for some time, feeling the weight of my transgressions heavily upon my soul. On a snowy Sunday morning, I was on my way to a particular church, but the snow-storm forced me to turn aside into a small Primitive Methodist chapel on Artillery Street in Colchester.

The minister that day was unable to reach the chapel due to the snow, so a thin-looking man, a shoemaker or tailor, went up to the pulpit to preach. His text was from Isaiah: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

The poor man had little to say, but what he said was powerful to me. He fixed his eyes on me and said, “Young man, you look miserable. And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you don’t obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.”

Then he shouted, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ! Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!”

At that moment, I saw the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, “Look!” what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

In that moment, the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with enthusiasm of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him.

This, dear friend, is how the Lord saved my soul. It was by His grace alone, through the simple act of looking to Christ in faith. And I have been looking unto Him ever since.

• • •

FL: *Were you surprised by the tremendous reception that your preaching received over the years? To what do you attribute it?*

ALS: Your question touches upon a matter that has often caused me to marvel at God's ways. Indeed, I was continually surprised and humbled by the reception my preaching received.

When I first came to London, a mere lad of 19, I could scarcely have imagined the crowds that would eventually gather to hear the Word preached. From the very beginning, the chapel was filled to capacity, with people even standing outside the windows to listen. As our congregation grew and we moved to larger venues, the crowds continued to swell beyond all expectation.

To what do I attribute this? Certainly not to any particular gift or ability of my own. I have always been keenly aware of my own inadequacies and limitations. No, I can attribute this reception only to the sovereign grace and power of God.

First and foremost, I believe it was the message itself that drew people. I determined, like the apostle Paul, to know nothing among my hearers "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The gospel, when preached plainly and earnestly, has a power all its own to attract souls and change lives.

Secondly, I believe God sovereignly chose to bless our ministry during a time of great spiritual hunger in England. Many were weary of dry, formal religion and longed for a vibrant, personal faith. The

simple, heartfelt preaching of the gospel met a deep need in many hearts.

Thirdly, I must acknowledge the power of prayer. Our church was a praying church. Before every service, a group of our members would gather to plead with God for His blessing on the preaching of His Word. I am convinced that much of the fruit we saw was a direct answer to these prayers.

Fourthly, I strove always to preach in a way that common people could understand. I used simple language, vivid illustrations, and applied the truth directly to daily life. This approach, by God's grace, seemed to resonate with people from all walks of life.

Lastly, the wide distribution of my sermons in print allowed the message to reach far beyond those who could attend in person. This was entirely God's doing—I simply preached as faithfully as I could, and He saw fit to multiply the impact in ways I could never have orchestrated.

In all of this, I have always been mindful of the apostle Paul's words: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Any fruit that came from our ministry was entirely due to His gracious work. To Him alone be the glory.

• • •

FL: *Tell me about the Down-grade controversy. How did it come about? Why did you respond to it as you*

did? What was the most difficult aspect of it, and what lessons would you draw from it for God's people and ministers today?

ALS: The Down-grade Controversy, ah, it pains me even now to recall it. Yet, it was a battle that had to be fought for the sake of God's truth. Let me explain its origins, my response, and the lessons I believe we can draw from it.

The controversy began in 1887 when I noticed a concerning trend in our Baptist Union and in broader evangelicalism. There was a gradual shift away from the fundamental doctrines of the faith—what I termed a “down-grade” in theology. This included questioning the inerrancy of Scripture, doubting the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and even challenging the deity of our Lord.

I first addressed these issues privately, hoping to stem the tide of liberal theology that was creeping into our churches. However, when private appeals proved ineffective, I felt compelled to make the matter public. In August 1887, I published an article in my magazine, “The Sword and the Trowel,” entitled “The Down Grade.” This was followed by several more articles outlining my concerns.

My response was driven by a deep conviction that the truth of God's Word must be defended at all costs.

As a watchman on the walls of Zion, I could not remain silent while the foundations of our faith were being eroded. I called for the Baptist Union to adopt a clear statement of faith, affirming the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

The most difficult aspect of this controversy was undoubtedly the personal cost. Many of my friends and fellow ministers did not share my concerns or thought I was overreacting. The Baptist Union refused to take a stand on doctrine, arguing for a more inclusive approach. As a result, I felt I had no choice but to withdraw from the Union in October 1887—a painful decision that led to misunderstanding and broken relationships.

From this controversy, I would draw several lessons for God's people and ministers today:

1. The importance of doctrinal vigilance: We must always be on guard against subtle shifts away from biblical truth. As Paul urged Timothy, we must “guard the good deposit” (2 Timothy 1:14).
2. The necessity of contending for the faith: Jude exhorts us to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). There are times when we must take a stand, even if it costs us dearly.

3. The danger of compromise: In our desire for unity, we must never compromise on essential doctrines. True Christian unity is based on truth, not at the expense of it.
4. The need for clarity in our confessions: Churches and denominations should have clear statements of faith that articulate their core beliefs.
5. The importance of addressing error with both firmness and love: While we must be uncompromising on truth, we should always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
6. The reality of spiritual warfare: Attacks on fundamental doctrines are not merely academic disagreements, but spiritual battles requiring spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).
7. The cost of conviction: Standing for truth may cost us friendships, reputation, and position. We must be prepared to count the cost (Luke 14:28).
8. The priority of Scripture: All controversies must be settled by appeal to God's Word, not human opinion or cultural trends.

In conclusion, while the Down-grade Controversy was painful and divisive, I believe it was necessary. The issues at stake were, and remain, central to our faith.

As I said then, and would say now: “I am quite willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years, but the more distant future shall vindicate me.¹ I am confident that the present struggle is not about trifles. Those who think so will live to regret their blindness.” *[Editor’s note: the last two sentences of this quotation could be a “hallucination.” See Observation 3 below.]*

May God grant His church today the wisdom, courage, and love to stand firm in the faith once delivered to the saints.

OBSERVATIONS

1. It should go without saying that this conversation is not equivalent to an interview with Charles Spurgeon. Neither we nor the AI model knows what Spurgeon would say. The AI model has been trained using a massive amount of data, including, without a doubt, the vast corpus of Spurgeon’s writings freely available on the internet as well as abundant secondary sources. The interview answers are a compilation and recombination of this data, expressed in Spurgeon’s style.
2. Large language models work by predicting what next word fits best with the overall context of the conversation. Therefore, AI is better at giving plausible answers than at giving accurate answers.

The tendency of AI to give bad answers that sound good is called “hallucination.” Recent models have improved their accuracy but are still not completely trustworthy. The accuracy of an AI model is much better in areas where there is a significant amount of data and where the data is overwhelmingly in agreement. AI is more prone to making things up in “edge” cases, that is, where there is little data available or where there is disagreement about the facts.

3. The danger of plausible hallucinations is illustrated by this simulated interview. I checked the overall historical claims of the AI Spurgeon using Microsoft Copilot AI, which provides citations of sources. It concluded: “Overall, the statements made in the simulated interview align well with historical facts as found in publicly available documents and primary sources.” Nevertheless, material in the quotation attributed to Spurgeon about the Down-grade controversy seems to be problematic. The AI attributes to Spurgeon the following:

As I said then, and would say now: “I am quite willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years, but the more distant future shall vindicate me. I am confident

that the present struggle is not about trifles. Those who think so will live to regret their blindness.”

Although the first sentence of this quotation is well known and often cited, I cannot find the next two sentences by means of an internet search. Therefore, they might be a hallucination.

4. Another problem with the use of AI is the possibility of plagiarism. Because large language models use sophisticated autocomplete algorithms, they do not copy text from sources but generate a plausible sequence of words. Nevertheless, if a portion of text occurs frequently in the training data, it becomes much more likely that the AI will generate that same portion of text, in effect plagiarizing it. Grammarly’s plagiarism detector reported, “11% of your document matches external sources.” This comprised a total of ten passages. Six of these are biblical quotations, although the AI does not seem to be consistent as to the version quoted. Of the remaining four, three seem to be quoted directly or indirectly from Spurgeon’s autobiography, and one is from a doctoral dissertation, which in turn quotes from another of Spurgeon’s works.²

5. Using AI to interrogate important historical figures can have beneficial uses in education or stimulating interest in church history. It is crucial, however, not to rely on the AI-generated answers as authoritative. When a human being talks about Spurgeon, we intuitively understand that it is an interpretation. However, there is a danger that our trust in the accuracy of computers will lead us to place an overreliance on the “interpretations” of the AI.

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¹ J. Lewis, “Insights from Charles Spurgeon’s Christ-Centered Preaching for a Changing Culture,” DMin diss., Liberty University, April 27, 2012, 135. <https://core.ac.uk/download/58824557.pdf>. Lewis is quoting Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, rev. ed. (Banner of Truth, 1960), 360.

² Lewis, 135.

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Erik D. Hanson

Who's Afraid of AI?

Today, there is widespread discussion about AI, and this discussion reflects radically different opinions. Influential AI developers and promoters argue for AI's almost unlimited potential to improve life. On the other end of the spectrum, many people fear that a superintelligent AI could soon endanger or replace humans. Between these views, many people are naturally concerned

about this technology's short-term and long-term effects. Concern about AI is significant and increasing. For example, in March 2023, a YouGov survey found that 29% of respondents feared AI could adversely affect their careers.¹ A year and a half later, that number had risen to almost 50%.²

Christians are not exempt from concerns about AI. A recent survey by Barna Research indicates that 72% of Christians surveyed do not think AI will positively impact the world.³ In the same study, over half of US Christians said they would be disappointed if their churches used AI technology. The growing concern about AI is understandable, given the rapid technological changes and the grave uncertainty about an AI future. However, because Christians know God, we can handle fear correctly. To do so, we must learn to approach our fears biblically and develop an accurate understanding of AI.

RESPONDING BIBLICALLY TO FEAR

Philippians 4:6–9 instructs believers about overcoming their anxiety. Paul exhorts the church at Philippi to pray to God rather than to fear (4:6). This prayer should be accompanied by thanksgiving, encouraging a focus on God. As a result, the believer will experience God's incomprehensible peace, which will guard his heart and mind (4:7). In addition to prayer and thanksgiving, God desires Christians to think about what is true, honest, right, pure, lovely, good, valuable, and praiseworthy (4:8). This implies that anxiety stems from faulty thinking. Finally, Paul reminds believers to take what they have learned and to practice it by obeying God's commands (4:9a).

The Christian who prays about his anxieties while intentionally thinking and living rightly will experience God's presence and peace regardless of circumstances (4:9b).

UNDERSTANDING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

We must understand biblical principles and apply them practically. This requires understanding AI's history and operation.

The history of AI. Based on the work of Alan Turing, a British logician, the term *artificial intelligence* was coined in 1956 by computer scientist John McCarthy during a meeting of highly acclaimed researchers at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. Artificial intelligence combines math, computer technology, and science to program a digital computer or robot “to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings.”⁴ In 1961, General Motors utilized the first industrial robots. Just a few years later, in 1966, Joseph Weizenbaum, a psychotherapist, wrote the first AI “chatbot” program, ELIZA, which was programmed to communicate with humans. ELIZA was extremely limited, but advances in technology and data eventually resulted in the

development of ChatGPT, which is currently the best-known AI chatbot. ChatGPT and similar models interact with people through natural language rather than computer code, making them accessible to most users. Further, these algorithms have improved education, medicine, and business. As AI continued to advance, its historic accomplishments included the creation of the driverless car in 1986 by Mercedes-Benz, the victory of the AI computer Deep Blue over the reigning world chess champion in 1997, and the defeat of two Jeopardy champions by IBM's Watson, a natural language processing computer, in 2011.

Generative AI and large language models.

After more than six decades of experimentation and uneven progress, AI can now perform various tasks, such as recognizing cancer in radiology scans, predicting customer preferences based on purchase history, developing complex and innovative ideas for brainstorming, and writing music, stories, and poetry. AI's surprising and complex capabilities are

known as “emergent behavior.” This characteristic of generative AI allows it to create original content such as music, pictures, video, and text.

Generative AI models are built on neural networks, mathematical systems based on the human brain. “Deep” neural networks have many layers of interconnected artificial neurons. They are not programmed by being given a specific set of computer codes. Instead, they are trained by being exposed to vast amounts of data from which they draw inferences and discern patterns. One type of neural network, the large language model (LLM), uses a technique called natural language processing to predict the meaning and importance of words in their broader context. One can view them as highly sophisticated and capable versions of the autocomplete function on phones. Some of the better-known LLM families are Open AI’s ChatGPT, Anthropic’s Claude, Google’s Gemini, and Meta’s LLaMA.

Natural language processing allows these models to interpret and generate language in ways that seem truly human. However, since these systems lack cognitive ability and process only what is plausible from their inputs, they are prone to “hallucinations,” which essentially involve making things up. AI systems are also subject to bias, inaccurate or unfair results in content or language. Besides generative AI, there are several other types of AI, including explainable AI (explains its actions to humans), sustainable AI (sustainably benefits humanity and ecology), symbolic AI (depends upon symbols of more complex tasks), and trustworthy AI (earns humans’ trust).

HOW INTELLIGENT CAN THEY GET?

Regardless of technological advancement, all current AI models are still classified as ANI (Artificial Narrow Intelligence) because their performance, while genuinely impressive, is limited in scope and usually requires human direction. However, the major AI companies

are urgently competing to reach AGI (Artificial General Intelligence). This hypothetical AI system would be as good as or superior to the average person at almost any intellectual activity. Beyond AGI, AI corporations hope to enter the realm of science fiction and generate an ASI (Artificial Superintelligence) that surpasses the most intelligent humans at every task. Whether AGI or ASI is attainable is uncertain, although the models are becoming increasingly capable.

The vision of Artificial Super-intelligence gives rise to speculation about benevolent or oppressive machine gods. Professor Yuval Harari, author and conference speaker for the World Economic Forum (WEF), claims, “AI can create new ideas, can even write a new Bible. . . . In a few years, there might be religions that are actually correct, that—just think about a religion whose holy book is written by an AI.”⁵

THE BENEFITS OF AI

Regardless of one’s view about the future of AI, the recent technological wave has already

produced impressive practical results. Mustafa Suleyman, co-founder of Google DeepMind, observes, “In 2010 almost no one was talking seriously about AI,” but now, “AI is everywhere on the news and in your smartphone, trading stock, and building websites.”⁶ One example of the benefits of AI technology in daily life is how often people use virtual assistants, such as Google, Siri, and Alexa, to answer questions, play music, and control home devices. In fact, by 2025, it is projected that there will be 91.9 million Google Assistant users, 86.5 million Siri users, and 77.2 million Alexa users.⁷

Besides using virtual assistants, a significant minority of people regularly engage with AI through a chat service (44%), social media (37%), over the phone (31%), and via text messaging (31%).⁸ AI also benefits education. Yale humanities professor Alexander Gil Fuentes observes, “In the humanities—English, literature, art, music, and culture—

we find that generative AI is a terrific step toward helping students create something original.”⁹

Further, in a recent study by the American Medical Association, two-thirds of 1,081 physicians praised the benefits of using AI in medicine and health care. Dr. Rohit Chandra, Chief Digital Officer at Cleveland Clinic, observes, “Today, there’s a decent chance a computer can read an MRI or an X-ray better than a human, so it’s relatively advanced in those use cases. The potential for it is there, and it’s also quite promising.”¹⁰ AI technology is also used in doctors’ offices to make the patient’s visits more efficient and effective.

In business, AI has proven effective at reducing human error, enhancing efficient decision-making, improving workflows, performing hazardous tasks, and displaying full-time availability. Contrary to common belief, “AI doesn’t have to be a business threat. In fact, failing to embrace it could be what leads to a swift demise.”¹¹

GENUINE CONCERNS ABOUT AI

While AI technology has numerous benefits, there are legitimate concerns regarding its potential for adverse use and effects. There is a growing fear that AI may eliminate jobs. Goldman Sachs forecasts that over 300 million jobs worldwide might eventually end due to AI's implementation in business.¹² At a recent technology conference, Elon Musk went so far as to say, "Probably none of us will have jobs."¹³ Another concern is the possible rise of the modern surveillance state due to AI's capabilities to analyze our data. Larry Ellison, co-founder of the software company Oracle, predicts such a situation in the United States. "Citizens will be on their best behavior because we're constantly recording and reporting everything that is going on."¹⁴ This is similar to how China uses its social credit scoring system, as the government rewards behavior that it deems acceptable and punishes behavior that it views as unacceptable.

Although there is debate as to how dystopian the Chinese system actually is, it is “undeniably intrusive. Government agencies compile and share data on judgments against individuals or companies.”¹⁵

For some believers, these prospects have led to negative attitudes toward AI, speculation about its use during the Great Tribulation, and a possible connection with the Antichrist’s coming rule. Jimmy Evans and Mark Hitchcock, conservative evangelical leaders, write, “Artificial intelligence will likely power elements of the Beast system depicted in Revelation 13. . . . AI in forms like advanced facial recognition, natural language processing, and machine learning will likely assist global manhunts for dissenters who will be killed for resisting (Revelation 20:4).”¹⁶

With the rise of a modern surveillance state and social credit systems, Christians and non-Christians alike may fear the potential for controlling and authoritarian

governments. Also, the potential loss of jobs and the ensuing effects on the economy due to the dependency on AI technology is concerning and can cause anxiety. For the believer, the answer to such fears is not to ignore the possible dangers but to remember that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Amid fears, God gives believers power, love, and self-discipline to think rightly through His Spirit’s enablement.

A FINAL CONSIDERATION

Although AI provides tremendous technological potential and advancement in the 21st century, fears persist. For such a time as this, God desires believers to deal with their fear biblically (Phil. 4:6–7). As a result, believers will experience God’s perfect peace (4:9). However, Christians must choose to think rightly (4:8). In application to AI technology, this demands a comprehension of its history, terms, benefits, and possible adverse effects.

Once a proper understanding of AI has been developed, including its potential harm, turn your gaze upon your glorious Savior in trust (Isa. 26:3–4) and surrender your fear to Him, “for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

Erik D. Hanson has served in pastoral ministry in Pennsylvania and New Jersey for fifteen years.



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Scott Olson

The Ministry of Personal Presence



A car drives by and moves in front of me at the arrivals area in the airport. It navigates three lanes of cars that are stopping and starting, and people are walking around the stopped cars, opening doors and stowing bags. It is a foray into practical chaos. What is truly amazing here is that no human driver is in the car. It is a Waymo autonomous car moving nimbly about the airport as if it had the seasoned experience of a New York taxi driver. Since I live in a big

city, seeing driverless vehicles is not new to me, but seeing one in action in this very difficult situation made me want to learn more. “Sense, solve, and go.” These are the priorities of Waymo automation. On their website, Waymo states their mission: “Be the most trusted driver,” making it safer, more accessible, and more sustainable to get around without the need for a human at the wheel.

Since technology has developed enough to reduce injuries and fatalities through removing the human element, we have to consider carefully when and where personal contact and presence cannot be replaced. People are missing. In an age of avatars, contactless ordering, driverless taxis, and soulless personal assistants, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are called by Christ to the personal ministries of sharing the gospel and discipling His followers. Though technology can assist in communication, this ministry work is primarily face to face, hand to hand, and heart to

heart. Biblical personal ministry recognizes the priority of investing in another, particularly by embracing the duties and opportunities of personal presence.

Following Christ means prioritizing His work. We have a mission, we have a Helper, and we must prioritize the will of God in every situation. Like Jesus, we meet people in our normal course of life where we live, shop, play, and travel. God may want us to present the gospel to the lost (Jesus at the well, John 4), teach someone to pray (Jesus with His disciples, Matthew 6), invite someone to join us in a life event (Barnabas invites Saul to minister), comfort someone in suffering (Paul with the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 1), or even restore a fallen leader (Jesus with Peter on the seashore, John 21).

Personal presence impacts people. A pattern of personal ministry seems to be illustrated in the Scriptures. Personal presence (1) captures the present moment, (2) responds

to the people, (3) adapts to the location, (4) shares the gospel or the biblical truth appropriate to the situation, and (5) continues ministering until the work is completed or God moves His servant on. Let's focus on these five points for a moment.

We need to recognize the opportunities God gives us. We are time-bound people—we can act only in the present. We must realize the moments when God's mission should take priority over our planned schedule.

Are you alert to opportunities to engage with people? It is God's providence that let you meet that person who is the object of His love and the target of His grace. Technology threatens to capture your attention at the cost of ignoring those literally right next to you. Don't let your phone distract you from real personal contact with those who need Christ or who need encouragement. Simple manners provide a means to interact naturally with people. Make eye contact, smile, and start or

respond to a conversation. You will be surprised where it leads.

God's providence also let you meet that person in that place. Prioritize the opportunities that each setting offers, whether you are sharing a meal, walking in a park, standing in line at a store, meeting for coffee, or sitting next to a stranger on an airplane.

Each providential appointment is a chance to assist, to encourage, to challenge, to laugh together, or to share the Good News. As God's messenger, be ready to share His truth by responding to the situation and meeting the person's need while doing good to all men.

Finally, be willing to continue the work of personal ministry, building upon each encounter and faithfully investing in the relationship until your work is finished or the opportunity is no longer available. Sometimes this looks like a continuing conversation that picks up periodically when you meet with

someone, or a regularly scheduled meeting that has specific goals that you both desire to accomplish.

While on vacation, I headed out to a new disc golf course. I played the first hole and finished with a par. There was no map posted, so I tried to follow the arrows on the trees to guess the direction of the next basket. As I moved to the second tee, a disc landed near my foot, and I realized another group was playing the first hole. After apologizing for the close call, two men greeted me and finished the hole. Now I had a choice: go on by myself and discover the course as I played or ask the other players about the course. I decided to ask, and after talking for a few minutes, they agreed to let me play along with them.

While playing the next hole, I was asked about my work and said that I worked for a Bible college in Chandler. Almost immediately one of the men shared his name, said that he was a Christian, and then apologized to me

for his language—the things that he would probably say as we played. He admitted that though he was working on his language, he still struggled with it. As we played, our conversation moved back and forth among the challenges of the game, his personal life story, and Bible questions. After the third hole, the second player apologized for not offering me a smoke as he lit up, and he commented that this habit was better than some of the other options. At the fifth hole, the second player also shared that he was a Christian, had trusted Jesus as his Savior, and wanted to know how grace and mercy worked. The first player moved closer to us, stating that he wanted to hear the answer, too. I pointed them to John's testimony that Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). This led to a rich conversation about Christ.

Our group finished nine holes of disc golf talking about the return of the Lord. My time was up for the day, and we parted with friendly

goodbyes and appreciation for having shared the truths of God's Word. This was certainly not what I expected when I went out to learn a new course, and I was amazed that I had experienced this pattern of personal presence in ministry: a disc landing at my feet (the moment), an unknown course (the location), two unknown people (I sought opportunity through questions), and the Bible questions they had (I shared the applicable truth). I was able to encourage them regarding the need for personal growth, the walk of a disciple, and the way God's grace and mercy impact a life. We were all encouraged and God was glorified.

In John 13, Jesus reiterates the need for His disciples to serve one another. True love displays itself in action, and considering what is before them, Jesus prepares the disciples with an object lesson on serving, pointed teaching, and finally a command to "love one another as I have loved you" (v. 34). We see "one another" statements throughout the New

Testament, demonstrating that the disciples grasped the importance of Jesus' command and many of the ways it was to be applied and expressed. In Galatians 6:2, we see that we are to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Hebrews 10:24–25 commands that when we meet together, we are to exhort one another to love and to good works. There is no doubt that technology can enable instant communication, but encouraging words have more effect when given in person. You can sign up to chat with a virtual AI mental health therapist but all it will do is rehash your own thoughts and give them back to you. When the church meets, we are to exhort one another from God's Word, learning to love ourselves less and to love others more, encouraging each other to live like Christ.

As we live in the age of technology, we must not ignore the commands to care for one another. Virtual contact removes the human touch and often creates distance, even muting

the voice of compassion as we find ourselves out of touch with people's lives and needs. So much is communicated by body language, eye contact, and a hug. During the COVID-19 restrictions, we could text each other and hear sermons online, but we still longed to actually meet with each other because the body of Christ, the church, belongs together. There may be occasions when the time expended on personal ministry seems to be inefficient, but it is productive in the most important areas, the areas most connected with our mission as Christians: the Great Commission and edifying the church.

Scott Olson is the director of mentoring and recruitment for International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona. He previously served as the director of the Institute of Ministry at Camp Ironwood and prior to that was the youth pastor at Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona, for fifteen years.



FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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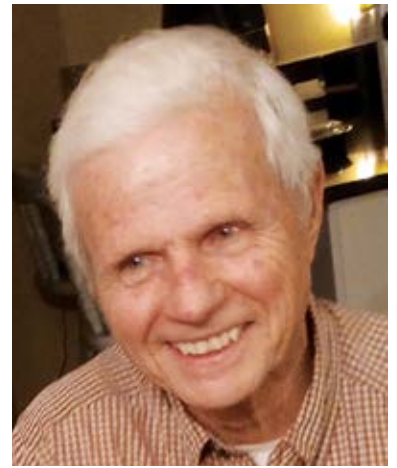
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A Thank You and Tribute to Jerry Sivnksty

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty faithfully wrote articles for *FrontLine* for more than twenty years, seeking to encourage all believers and especially those in full-time ministry. The *FrontLine* staff would like to thank him for the blessing he has been and contribution he has made to *FrontLine*. His regular column, “Evangelist’s Perspective,” is retiring with this issue.



Jerry Sivnksty grew up in Marion County, West Virginia, and graduated from East Fairmont High School in 1960. Raised in a somewhat religious household, he came to

Christ during his senior year in high school. Following graduation, he was unsure what the Lord wanted him to do with his life, so he applied for a job with *The Fairmont Times* and was hired—because he was the fastest typist, able to accurately produce 112 words per minute.

During his brief stint with the newspaper, Jerry felt the call of God to ministry and decided to attend Bible college, eventually making his way to Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. There he majored in Bible and minored in speech, seeking not only to gain training in the Scriptures, but also to work at overcoming a life-long speech impediment.

As a freshman at BJU, Jerry knew the Lord wanted him to eventually be an evangelist in itinerant ministry. During his senior year at the university, he planted and pastored Fellowship Baptist Church in Anderson, South Carolina.

After leaving Fellowship Baptist and entering full-time evangelism, Jerry made it his goal to continue his graduate training at BJU, which

he successfully completed. Over the course of fifty years in ministry, Jerry has preached literally around the world, spending on average ten months out of every year on the road.

He and his wife, Sharon, have raised three sons and a daughter, all of whom are in full-time gospel ministry—a tribute to the example of Jerry and Sharon for Christ and their effectiveness in making disciples.

Jerry's daughter, Jennifer, wrote of her father, "If I had to sum up my dad's 50-plus years of full-time ministry in two words, it would be these: zeal and faithfulness. From the very beginning of Dad's years of pastoring and evangelism, his motto has been, 'Don't lose your zeal for souls!' And I can attest that he is still living up to this statement. He still preaches the gospel with fervor, he takes every opportunity to personally witness to people, he gives out gospel tracts, and he still gets thrilled when he hears of someone who has put his trust in Christ as Savior.

“Dad has also maintained an example of faithfulness to God all these years. In spite of opposition, challenges, trials, and setbacks, he has continued to persevere in both his personal walk with the Lord and his ministry. When he’s not traveling, Dad faithfully attends church (where I attend) and does what he can to serve his church family and community. By God’s grace, Dad is still seeking to live out his life’s verse, ‘He must increase; but I must decrease’ (John 3:30).”

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)

The history of modern missions is surely the most consequential and interesting of all adventure stories since the Reformation. Its dogged advance round the world has been despite determined opposition of every sort and disheartenments of every stripe. An old adage says that we learn more from a defeat than from a victory. Many have been the initial defeats of missionary enterprises in the last two and a half centuries; and as a result, much has been learned.

An early chapter in the story of modern missions was nearly nothing but defeat—actually, two in quick succession. The critical lessons subsequently learned came at the high cost of lost years, resources, relationships, and lives; these lessons should be held, therefore, in solemn trust by those of us who commission missionaries today.

The missions agency at whose expense these lessons pass down to us was the same that sent out

David Livingstone some forty years after our story. Founded in 1795 and named the London Missionary Society (LMS), its aim was to unite evangelicals of all denominations in an endeavor *for promoting the great work of introducing the Gospel and its ordinances to heathen and other unenlightened countries.*¹



The first board of directors agreed upon an enterprise in the South Seas as its inaugural effort. Funds were raised, candidates were interviewed and outfitted, and in August 1796 the first LMS missions party embarked for Tahiti on a small ship, the *Duff*, purchased with funds donated by enthusiastic Christians.

The missionary party consisted of thirty men, six wives, and three children. Only four of the men were ordained ministers. The others were shopkeepers, shoemakers, carpenters, gardeners, surgeons, blacksmiths, weavers, bricklayers, and other sorts of men skilled in secular employments.

As the *Duff* left the dock and sailed down the Thames, the missionary party sang heartily, *Jesus at Thy command, we launch into the deep*. The party's first Lord's Day included services on the quarterdeck, a sermon from 1 Corinthians 12:10, and a feeling of *refreshing from the presence of the Lord*.

After a voyage of nearly seven months, the islands were sighted. The missionaries strategized, with the result that eighteen of the men, including all the ministers and those married, settled on Tahiti. Ten of the remaining single men disembarked on Tonga, and the last two were sent to open a work in the Marquesas Islands.

Once landed, the novice missionaries were almost immediately staggered by the islanders' open immorality.

The earthly paradise of Tahiti—so rich in natural beauty of mountain and valley, of rivulet and cascade, of sea and sky, where Nature was such a loving and constant mother as to take away all motive and all need for toil—was the very seat of Satan, the centre and the home of the foulest vices that can degrade humanity.

One of the first lessons the missionaries learned, since confirmed over a wide field of experience, was that most savage peoples have neither the practice nor even the conception of chastity.

The islanders' vices included *unnatural crimes, which we dare not name . . . committed daily without the idea of shame or guilt. In various districts of the islands there are men who dress as women.*

Many of the islanders, including the wife of one of the most powerful men on the island, were members of a sexually liberated society named *Areoi*. A primary condition to continued membership was childlessness. This allowed the upper classes to fornicate with the lower classes without compromising the purity of their lineage. Accordingly, any babies conceived by members of the society were either aborted or mercilessly killed at birth.

At a place on the island called Oparre was the residence of a great pagan deity named, Ooroo. Several altars contained the skulls of sacrificed individuals. One skull was split across, upturned, and used as a pool for confining a young turtle. *Oh . . . horrid scenes.*

ATTRITION

The first “casualty” among the missionaries was John Harris, one of the single men dropped off at Marquesas. No sooner had he and his companion, William Crook, paddled themselves ashore, than they were approached by native women making suggestive advances. So baffled were the women by the men’s refusals, that later that night Harris was rudely awakened and physically overpowered by the wife of the local chief and other women who proceeded to investigate whether he was actually a male. The next

morning, humiliated and distraught, Harris refused to remain on the island and reboarded the *Duff*. Crook determined to remain, but in less than a year he, too, abandoned the work.

The *Duff* remained in the region for another six months. By the time she was ready to depart, two more of the missionary party, one a surgeon, had already decided to rejoin it to return to England. But the most damaging desertions were still to come.

Shortly after the *Duff*'s departure, a second ship, the *Nautilus*, appeared off the coast. While she lay at anchor the local chief argued for arms and ammunition in exchange for water and food. The missionaries attempted to dissuade the captain, thus incurring the wrath of the chief. In addition, when two of the crew deserted and a deputation sent to find them was assaulted and abused by the islanders, the missionaries attempted to intervene. The local chief was further angered.

From that point on, the missionaries began reconsidering their position. The result was that fear overrode their commitment, and eleven of the remaining men, plus four of the wives and their children, sailed with the *Nautilus* for Port Jackson, Australia. Thus, after just a year, only six single men and one married couple were prepared to persevere on Tahiti.

The eight who remained renewed their commitments and cast themselves afresh upon the Lord. To the LMS directors in England they wrote resolutely,

Dearly Beloved Brethren,

Time and circumstances will not admit us at this present to enter into particulars. The change that has taken place in our situation, by the sudden resolution of the major part of the society of missionaries, to depart from this island of Otaheite, for Port Jackson, in New Holland, we trust will nothing hinder that work which first induced us to offer our service to the Directors of the Missionary Society, supported us under the heavy trial of forsaking parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc., etc., and still encourages us patiently to abide the will of God concerning us on this island. We can only assure the Directors of the Society, our confidence is the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose aid we depend upon, and whose servants we desire to manifest ourselves to be.

Tragically, just five months later, one of their number, Thomas Lewis, one of the ordained ministers, sent a letter to his fellows informing them that he had determined to marry one of the native women. The missionaries had earlier agreed among themselves that none of them would

do this. But grievously compounding Lewis's abandonment of his pledge was the fact that the woman was not a new convert, but a heathen, *addicted to all the abominable practices of savage life*. After repeated attempts to dissuade Lewis, the others were constrained to inform him that they no longer considered him to be a Christian. The following year Lewis was murdered. The evidence suggested that the woman's relatives coveted his goods, quarreled with him, and subsequently murdered him. When the news came to his abandoned brethren, they immediately sought out his residence, found the body, *took reverent and tender charge of it*, and buried it. *Our feelings, one of them wrote, cannot be committed to paper.*

Something similarly sad occurred on Tonga. The ten single men set ashore there discovered three Europeans who had deserted their ships to join themselves with the culture's vices. These three did all within their power to thwart the missionary endeavor. Within a year, George Veeson, a bricklayer, joined the three loose-living Europeans. The chief rewarded him with a piece of land, on which Veeson began assembling a harem. Later, three of the remaining nine missionaries were

killed by the islanders. The last six hid in caves until being taken aboard a visiting ship.

Veeson eventually repented and returned to England to confess his sin publicly. But the ruin of the work on Tonga was complete. It was over twenty years before there were again missionaries on Tonga.

SECOND MISSIONARY PARTY

While these sad events were taking place, the *Duff* was making her way back to England. In July 1798 she docked at London, her crew knowing nothing other than that their first voyage to Tahiti apparently had been a *marvelous success*. The news thrilled the supporting churches. Thanksgiving services were enthusiastically attended, and a special, general meeting was called for the purpose of authorizing a second voyage.

The candidates were more numerous than our ship was capable of conveying. All appeared with testimonials of their Christian conduct from their ministers and others. Carefully and repeatedly they were examined, as to their experience, principles, abilities, and motives, and such of them selected as appeared most proper for the work.

Among this second selection of volunteers were some preachers and a few skilled teachers. But as with the first party, most were botanists, agriculturists, and men experienced in working with their hands. Six of

the men had some medical knowledge, and two of the women were trained in midwifery. To their strong credit, *every individual of these missionaries left, apparently, comfortable stations, and some of them we know relinquished even advantageous prospects. We had reason to believe none were urged by necessity, or a love of change, to engage in the work.* Insofar as the committee could ascertain, each one had volunteered out of a sense that it would be through this strategic missionary venture that he or she could most glorify God.

The *Duff* finally sailed from Portsmouth on December 20, 1798. Two months later she had progressed on the high seas as far as Cape Frio. There disaster struck. A French privateer, *Le Grand Buonaparte*, hove into view, and soon overtook the *Duff*. A French privateer was a privately owned ship but commissioned by the government to attack enemy ships in times of war. Its crew received a portion of the value of any prize ship captured and of the sale of its cargo. Accordingly, armed men boarded the helpless *Duff* and claimed her and her cargo as their own. What a terrible agony when the men were subsequently separated from the women and children among other various vessels also taken by the *Le Grand Buonaparte*, and all set sail bound for the port of Monte Video.

By the end of March, all were landed and the *Duff* subsequently sold. The French captain, willing to treat his captives humanely, but nevertheless eager for profit, offered another of his prizes to Captain Robson in exchange for guarantees of purchase from the London Missionary Society. But where was the missionary party to sail once aboard? Should they return to England or attempt to continue on to Tahiti? Eventually they determined to proceed to Tahiti by way of the Cape of Good Hope, or if that could not be accomplished, to sail to Sierra Leone to see if they might be able to establish a mission there. But by the time they had concluded this approach, the French captain had sold the prize vessel. Finally, he arranged that those who had purchased the ship would convey the whole missionary party to Rio de Janeiro, provided that Captain Robson and his crew would work the vessel.

On May 9 they sailed. For nearly an entire miserable month they fought contrary winds. When finally they neared their destination, bad weather prevented their entering port, not just once, but twice! And then, to their exceedingly deep dismay, on the fifth of June they were captured all over again by a passing Portuguese fleet.

William Gregory later published an account of the sad events which displayed that at least he, among the

missionaries, attempted to view events through spiritually-minded eyes.

This second captivity was peculiarly trying: some of us ill, scarcely recovered from the indisposition of Nature's sorrow, with infants so young, compelled to enter open boats on the trackless ocean, some taken to one ship, some to another, while we were scarcely able to ask each other whither we were going, or bid adieu; or if we had even made inquiry, those who were conveying us were incapable of giving us information.

What in such a state could have reconciled the mind to that which was so opposite to flesh and blood, but the fullest conviction that it was the Lord's will, and that the Judge of all the earth doth right. How evidently did the events of this day speak the mind and will of God. We had been detained by contrary winds, fully three times longer than it was expected. Twice had we arrived near the desired port, and twice prevented from entering it. If we had been but one day sooner we should have reached the harbour without interruption, and if but one hour later the fleet would have been out of sight.

The missionaries were divided among three of the fleet's vessels and transported to Lisbon. On

September 21 the fleet reached that destination, and by October 4 and 5 the majority of the missionary party had sailed for England on two different vessels, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Fortitude*. Though alarmed several times *en route* due to the war then raging, they eventually anchored safely in Falmouth Harbor. Of the missionaries who remained for a time in Lisbon, one died, and one who sailed for England was captured yet a third time by another French privateer. Only one couple and Captain Robson eventually reached London.

Thus, within four years of the launching of the first group of thirty men, twenty *had proved either unequal or unfaithful to the work*. Three had been killed. When the second group of thirty is included in the tally, the result after ten years was that only nine out of sixty men remained on the islands and succeeded in doing something for the cause of Christ, computing to a loss or failure of a staggering 85% of the original workers. The loss of the *Duff* and other material assets was estimated to be *not less than £10,000*.

LESSONS

When news of these disappointments reached England, and assessment was made, a conclusion was reached: *Many causes contributed to this disastrous result*. These causes should be noted and given wise consideration by our sending agencies today.

One cause of failure was *the imperfect education of the great majority. The enormous waste of resources caused by the practical adoption of this view in the early years of the Society's work is an object-lesson for succeeding generations* (emphasis mine). The directors took this lesson to heart and established a fund to underwrite the training of especially promising candidates. What is particularly instructive is their conclusion about the nature of that training.

They must attend especially to missionary subjects. The lectures delivered to them must have this point continually in view. Their whole education must be missionary, and therefore conducted on a plan dissimilar from other seminaries, and even from those where the Christian ministry in this country is the subject.

In ours, the instructions must chiefly refer to the heart, and instead of cherishing the desire of shining in the world by distinguishing talents, must aim at subduing every elating thought, and at mortifying the vain propensities of our nature.

Our students are to learn how they may be patient and submissive under disappointments, persevering under long discouragements, ready to meet sufferings

or even death, if such should be the divine appointment. The education of a missionary is to prepare him for a work in which he must calculate on labour and danger, opposition and reproach. When he leaves his native country and friends, and goes forth to seek the salvation of his untutored brethren, he is to take this for his motto, "I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me."

Two additional lessons concerned marital status. On the one hand, the society learned that out of necessary regard for their wives and children, married men were more subject to fear and more prone to reasoning themselves into abandoning a work than their single counterparts. And yet, there was an advantage to marriage in the opposite direction. Single men were more vulnerable to sensual temptations. It appears now that it had been folly to set single men down into the midst of promiscuity. At the very least, a certain ratio of married couples to single men at each new station would have been prudent.

Yet another lesson concerned the spiritual maturity of missionary candidates. The society discovered that *the religious life of several was not sufficiently developed to stand the severe strain of attempting to live as Christians on Tahiti*. This assessment did not concern only those who

lapsed into immorality. Some even concluded that the French privateer had been heaven-sent to prevent some of the society's missionaries from ever stepping foot on the islands! *This seasonable interposition of Providence demands our gratitude*, one wrote. Subsequently, a committee was appointed to recommend measures for more thoroughly examining candidates. It recommended that from the time of a man's acceptance by the board, an entire year should elapse before his actual entrance into a work, so that his character could be *more fully ascertained*, and his *stability more satisfactorily proved*. Our current system of deputation, though not without its drawbacks, certainly contributes something helpful to this desirable end.

A final lesson concerns preliminary investigation of a field. In the case of the LMS, it seems that certain problems specific to the islands were not sufficiently taken into account. The vision for mission work in the South Seas had been excited largely by the accounts of Captain James Cook of his voyages aboard HMS *Endeavour* in 1768–71 and 1772–75. Cook captained the *Endeavour* across thousands of miles of hitherto uncharted waters, mapped the coastlines of New Zealand and various islands, and made contact with native peoples. Some of these encounters turned violent, resulting in several deaths. He also witnessed the

semi-naked state of the islands' women and observed human sacrifices on Tahiti firsthand. These things were recorded in his journals and could have been given greater weight when volunteers for the field were examined, so that each was constrained to reckon earnestly with the distinct possibility of a violent death, the rampant immorality, and the horrific displays of vicious inhumanity in that particular culture. In our case, the early setbacks of the LMS in this regard confirm the wisdom of our making possible, or even prescribing, survey trips as necessary to a missionary volunteer's settling upon a particular field, especially for his first experiences as a career missionary.

Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church" and subscribe.

* Quotations throughout this article are from Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795-1895*, vol. 1 (London, 1899).

BRING...THE BOOKS

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

Books Old and New

I have a particular fondness for old books, and among the oldest in my collection is *Behind the Scenes: Sketches from Real Life*, published by G. W. Lasher in 1883. The author, F. M. Iams, said the following in the first chapter: “I was an earnest student of books rather than of men, and of ideas rather than books. My intense desire to do good anchored me to the practical while my profound reverence for Bible truth made me an earnest student of doctrines. As a result, my preaching was at once plain, direct, argumentative, and practical.”

Here are five other notable books worth exploring, each offering unique historical and theological insights. I offer them with a caveat. I once heard a pastor say, “The Bible sheds a lot of light on these commentaries!”

Dr. Gray at Moody Bible Institute, compiled and edited by William M. Runyan (Oxford University Press, 1935)

James M. Gray was a distinguished scholar who authored thirty-six books during his lifetime. In the

1890s, he worked alongside D. L. Moody in evangelistic campaigns across New York, Boston, and Chicago. Gray was deeply involved with Moody Bible Institute, serving in various roles from summer guest lecturer to president (1904–1934). He was an early fundamentalist dispensationalist, and believed in the premillennial, pretribulation return of Christ.

Holy-Days and Holidays, by Edward M. Deems
(Funk and Wagnalls, 1902)

This 768-page volume is described as “a treasury of historical material, sermons in full and in brief, suggestive thoughts, and poetry, relating to holy days and holidays.” It includes a wealth of illustrative material and covers thirty-four holy days and holidays. One of the holidays is New Year’s Day. In that section you will find an excellent sermon on Luke 13:8 by Charles Haddon Spurgeon titled “This Year Also,” delivered from his sickbed. He sat up to write when he was able, but some of it was written with his head on his pillow.

Handbook of Christian Truth, by Harold J. Lindsell and Charles Woodbridge (Revell, 1953)

In their introduction, Lindsell and Woodbridge state that this book was written for two reasons: a long-felt need for such a volume and a sense of mission. They describe it as an expository work, not a

commentary or seminary textbook, but a plain statement of what the Bible teaches about key Christian doctrines and their application. The book categorizes its teaching under ten headings: “The Bible,” “The Unseen Powers,” “The Human Predicament and Its Solution,” “The Person and Ministry of Jesus Christ,” “The Doctrines of Salvation,” “The Believer’s Life with God,” “The Believer and the Church,” “The Believer’s Outreach,” “Man’s Ultimate Destiny,” and “The Believer’s Resources.”

The Christian Leaders of the Last Century, by J. C. Ryle (Charles Nolan, 2002)

This book consists of fourteen chapters that cover various subjects such as the religious and moral condition of England at the beginning of the 18th century and the revival of Christianity in the middle of the 18th century. It examines prominent figures like George Whitefield, John Wesley, and others. Chapter 14 serves as the conclusion, and the writing is characteristically Ryle: cogent, succinct, and fervent.

The Clans and Tartans of Scotland, by Robert Bain (Collins, 1953)

This secular book explores Scottish clans and tartans. The playful suggestion that we might receive a

bagpipe and kilt in heaven, rather than a harp and robe, resonates with my Scottish heritage.

Speaking of Scotland, according to the Scottish Preachers Hall of Fame (<http://www.newble.co.uk/hall/>), there are thirty-six notable Scottish preachers. Here are three:

John Knox (1505–1572): “This man carried out the Scottish Reformation, almost single-handed, and rescued Scotland from Popery in the teeth of determined opposition from Queen Mary and all the might of Rome.”

George Wishart (1513–1546): “A powerful Protestant preacher, confidant and mentor of John Knox. Preaching the Protestant Reform in 1546 he was betrayed to Cardinal David Beaton and imprisoned in the bottle dungeon at the Castle in St. Andrews. [He was] subsequently tried for heresy, and burnt at the stake outside the Castle.”

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661): “Best-known for his pastorship at Anwoth and his ‘Letters,’ he is also known for his intolerance of what ran counter to his firm convictions.”

RECENT READING

My most recent readings include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, whom President

Lincoln called “the woman who started the Civil War.” I also recently reread *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan. I don’t remember how many times I have read this, but it is always fresh and a blessing!

CURRENT READING

My current reading includes *Heaven: Priceless Encouragements on the Way to Our Eternal Home* by J. C. Ryle, and *Right Thinking for a Culture in Chaos*, a very timely compilation of articles by faculty members at The Master’s Seminary, edited by John MacArthur and Nathan Busenitz.

Dayton Walker is the former pastor of Grace Baptist Church in East Flat Rock, North Carolina, and is now fully retired.

STRAIGHT CUTS

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)

Leadership Lessons from Ephesus

The gospel itself was at risk in the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1). False teachers had insinuated themselves into the congregations, so Paul charged Timothy with the task of protecting the gospel by strengthening the churches. One of Bob Jones Sr.’s memorable “chapel sayings” declared that “everything rises and falls on leadership.” Paul would have agreed. He instructed Timothy to help the churches establish the right kind of leaders. First Timothy 3:1–7 explains the kind of leaders needed.

GOOD LEADERS HAVE THE CALL OF GOD

Members of conservative churches would not deny the importance of God’s call upon a pastor.¹ However, misconceptions abound regarding the nature of the call. The first two verses of 1 Timothy 3 guide us toward a clear and proper understanding.

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be . . .

This brief statement unites two elements that, when combined, paint a proper portrait of God's calling. They portray the call as a providential work rather than a singular event. First, God prepares a man by giving him a strong desire to serve in the pastoral role. A strong desire is the *subjective* element of the call of God. It is essential, but it cannot stand alone. A second element is equally essential. Verse two initiates a list of *objective* qualifications that validate a man's desires. Both elements, subjective and objective, are essential to confirm a man's calling; neither may be overlooked. First Timothy 3:14–15 removes any question about where the responsibility of evaluation lies:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.

The Puritan scholar, William Perkins, put it well to his students:

How can you know for yourself whether God [has called you] or not? . . . You must ask both your own conscience and the church. . . . Your conscience must judge of your willingness and the church of your ability.²

GOOD LEADERS HAVE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

A list of objective qualifications runs from verse 2 through verse 7 and begins with a strong requirement: the pastor “must be blameless.” Paul had in mind the absence of any evident stain of character that opponents can lay hold of and use against God’s representative. “Blameless” most likely serves as a heading for the list that follows.

The list falls into two sections, each signaled by the word “must.” It appears first in verse 2 and again in verse 7. The two-part division is significant. The pastor *must* be above reproach within the community of faith (verses 2–6—a single sentence). He also *must* have a good testimony outside the community of faith (verse 7—also a single sentence). When he is away from the church, he must “practice what he preaches” within the church. Hypocrisy is not allowed.

ABIDING LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

Following the heading “blameless,” Paul lists categories of pastoral qualifications:

1. Five characteristics of personal godliness (v. 2)
2. One vocational qualification (v. 2)
3. Four disqualifying characteristics (v. 3)
4. The qualification of domestic oversight (vv. 4–5)

5. The qualification of growing maturity (v. 6)

Paul's instructions find their primary application in a church's training and selection of pastoral leaders. However, a bird's-eye look at the list reveals lessons the church needs to heed in every age—especially our own.

The church has no spiritual hierarchy. Verses 2–6 contain only one vocational qualification: the pastor must be “able to teach.” All the other items in the list describe character and behavior God expects of all His children. Paul intended for the church to choose leaders from among those who live as Christians. That being true, Christians should pursue godly character by following their pastor's example (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. Heb. 13:7).

The church must never prefer giftedness above godliness. One striking feature of Paul's list is the dissymmetry between qualifications of character versus vocation. As already noted, he lists only one vocational skill, “able to teach.” The Greek text encapsulates it in one word, *didaktikos*—one word out of seventy-one total. The remaining seventy words describe the pastor's character! No matter how skillfully a pastor might teach the Scriptures, his gifting cannot excuse ungodliness. No pastor is ever “too important to fail” and every church must learn to value godliness above giftedness.

Steven Thomas has pastored Huron Baptist Church in Flat Rock, Michigan, since 1983.

¹ The text of 3:1 refers to the pastoral role of “bishop,” or “overseer.” This is one of three descriptive titles applied to the same office: elder, overseer, and pastor (see Acts 20:7, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1–2). This article uses the common title “pastor” throughout.

² *The Art of Prophesying* (Banner of Truth, 1996), 188–89.

WINDOWS

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

Logos Print Library

Do you have trouble finding sermon illustrations? Maybe you have an expansive print library. You’re sure there’s gold in them thar books. But as your deadline creeps steadily closer, you know you’ll never be able to prospect, let alone mine, their riches. Your mind wanders back to your days in the dorm. You knew a guy three doors down who had read the entire collected works of Spurgeon. If you asked him about a particular subject, he’d cock his head, lean back toward his bookshelf, pull down a particular volume, open it, and put his finger on just the paragraph you needed.

What if you could always have someone like that in your study, ready to point you to the perfect illustration within your own library? While not quite your old flesh-and-blood dorm buddy, Logos Bible Software allows you to search not only your entire digital Logos library, but *also* your print library—yes, those analog, shelf-bound, wonderful-smelling, good ol’ books.

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You're able to add only books that Logos has in its digital catalog, but the coverage is quite extensive. In some cases, you may not be able to find a particular publisher's edition of a book—for example, those from Banner of Truth. However, most public domain works like those of Spurgeon and the Puritans are available in Logos's catalog. In these cases, the page numbers might not match up, but the section or chapter headings can still guide you to the correct location within the book.

One final tip: Pay your kids to scan all your books into your Logos library from the Logos mobile app. (Disclaimer: Logos Bible Software is not responsible for covering the cost of your kids scanning your five-thousand-volume library at a quarter per book.)

HOW TO SEARCH YOUR PRINT LIBRARY CATALOG

Now that you have your Print Library Catalog set up, you can begin using it to search for illustrations. (1) In Logos, open the "Search" tool. (2) Within Search, select the "Books" tab to narrow your search

to just those resources in your own library.

(3) Now enter your query and run your search.

I recommend including your digital library in the search, but if you want to limit your search to just your Print Library Catalog, click “Your Books” in the top left corner and change your selection to “Print Library.”

Searching by exact phrase. The new Logos version released in October 2024 defaults to “Smart” search, but for the first few examples we’ll use “Precise” search. Click the word “Smart” on the right side of the search window and select “Precise” from the drop-down menu. Precise searching lets you group your results by a number of categories. I prefer to group by “Author” so I can scan through the list for names of authors I recognize.

Before you dive directly into searching, take a moment to review the instructions in the search pane. The search system gives you a lot of power, but it does require precision. For example, the difference between **bible:“john 1:1”** and **bible:=“john 1:1** is subtle (and I’ll explain the difference later), but they give you significantly different results. The jots and tittles do matter!

Let’s move on to some specific examples. Say I’m preaching through the Sermon on the Mount

and covering the Beatitudes this week. I could start by searching for a simple phrase like “blessed are the poor in spirit” (include the quotation marks to search for an exact phrase instead of the individual words). I sort my results by “Author,” and as I glance through the list of names, my eye falls on “MacLaren, Alexander.” I expand the results and see a blurb from his book on Esther–Ecclesiastes. This is not quite the book I was expecting, but the excerpt catches my attention, so I look it up. Thankfully, both the page number *and* the reference (Prov. 13:7) are right there on the screen, so I’d be able to find it even in a different edition if the page numbers don’t match. Here’s what I find:

Poor, and therefore an owner of a kingdom! Now I need not, at this stage of my sermon, insist upon the fact that that consciousness of poverty is the only fitting attitude for any of us to take up in view of the two facts with which I started, the fact of our dependence and the fact of our sinfulness. What absurdity it seems for a man about whom these two things are true, that, as I said, he began with a borrowed capital, and has only incurred greater debts in his transactions, there should be any foothold left in his own estimation on which he can stand and claim to

be anything but the pauper that he is.

Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Esther–Ecclesiastes* (Logos Bible Software, 2009), 171.

Very helpful! And best of all, finding this excerpt took me less than two minutes—not bad for a fairly simple search.

Of course, given that I’m preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, I would be remiss not to check the “Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn” entry for any choice quotations. And I am not disappointed:

No natural man born into this world likes to be poor in spirit. We are by nature the exact opposite to that; we are all born with a proud nature, and the world does its utmost to encourage our pride from our very birth.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed. (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 540.

Searching by passage. Another approach I could take is to search by passage. For example, if I were preaching through 1 Samuel 16, I could search for something like **bible:“1 sam 16”**. My results include Bunyan, who points out that not everybody who looks like a Christian really is one:

Q. But how if a man carrieth it well outwardly, so that he doth not dishonour the gospel before men, may not this be counted self-denial? A. No, if he be not right at heart; for though man looketh on the outward appearance, God looketh at the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

John Bunyan, *Instructions for the Ignorant*, vol. 2 (Logos Bible Software, 2006), 688.

Or perhaps my results include a note from *The Spurgeon Study Bible* that provides this application of the text:

16:12 “Then the Lord said, ‘Anoint him, for he is the one.’” Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to discover the object of God’s election. This would have been a difficult task if the God who sent him had not accompanied him and spoken with the sure voice of inspiration within him as soon as the chosen object stood before him. Our task is not to guess who are God’s elect, apart from marks and evidences. What was done in the councils of eternity before the world was made is hidden in the mind of God, and we must not curiously intrude where the door is closed by the hand of wisdom. Yet in the preaching of the Word, a discovery is made of God’s secret election. . . . We ministers have no other way by which to discern the saints of God,

and to separate the precious from the vile, but by faithfully preaching the truth of God as it is in Jesus, and observing its effects.

Spurgeon, *The Spurgeon Study Bible: Notes* (Holman, 2017), 364.

In a recent sermon at my local church, our pastor quoted from J. C. Ryle on Luke 17:32. How might he have found such a quote using Logos? We can search for **bible:="luke 17:32"**. Note the equal sign in the search query; this limits the search to exact references, when otherwise we would get results for all of Luke 17. My results yield a chapter from Ryle's *Holiness* titled "A Woman to Be Remembered," with this paragraph:

That look was a little thing, but *it told of secret love of the world* in Lot's wife. Her heart was in Sodom, though her body was outside. She had left her affections behind. . . . Her eye turned to the place where her treasure was, as the compass-needle turns to the pole.

J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties and Roots* (London, 1889), 239.

Using Logos's AI Smart Search. For one final example, I will delve into the scary world of AI. The new version of Logos includes an AI-powered Smart Search (this new AI search requires a subscription). I share many of the deep technical and theological con-

cerns about the use of AI, but that's a topic for another day. Search is actually one of the cases where AI's predictive nature is both useful and less problematic.

To use Logos's Smart Search, I change the search engine back from "Precise" to "Smart." I can then ask a simple question, such as "What did Spurgeon say about Lot's wife?" In this case, the first result I receive is from his sermon, "Remember Lot's Wife (No. 1,491)," which contains illustrations for my consideration. Like most applications of AI, your mileage may vary. Sometimes the results are spot on. Other times, you'll wonder where in the world the result came from.

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENTS

As you can see, using Logos to index and search your personal print library can help you quickly find illustrations during your sermon preparation. Like any tool, learning to use Logos Search effectively takes time. So don't give up immediately if you can't find what you're looking for. Take some time to watch the video cited above and keep trying. Over time you'll grow in your ability to recognize promising excerpts from the search results.

One final word of warning. If you're like me and find new tools fascinating, the excitement of using a new tool can distract from the actual point of using it

in the first place. When a tool becomes an end unto itself, especially in place of the life-and-death reality of preaching God's Word, it has become an idol. Don't let the tool or the process of setting up and learning it detract from the labor and prayer that must go into any Spirit-filled sermon. Logos can speed up finding sermon illustrations, but it cannot make you a holy man of God, strengthened by prayer and led by the Spirit when you enter the pulpit.

David Lowry is a technical manager at Logos Bible Software and a member of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.



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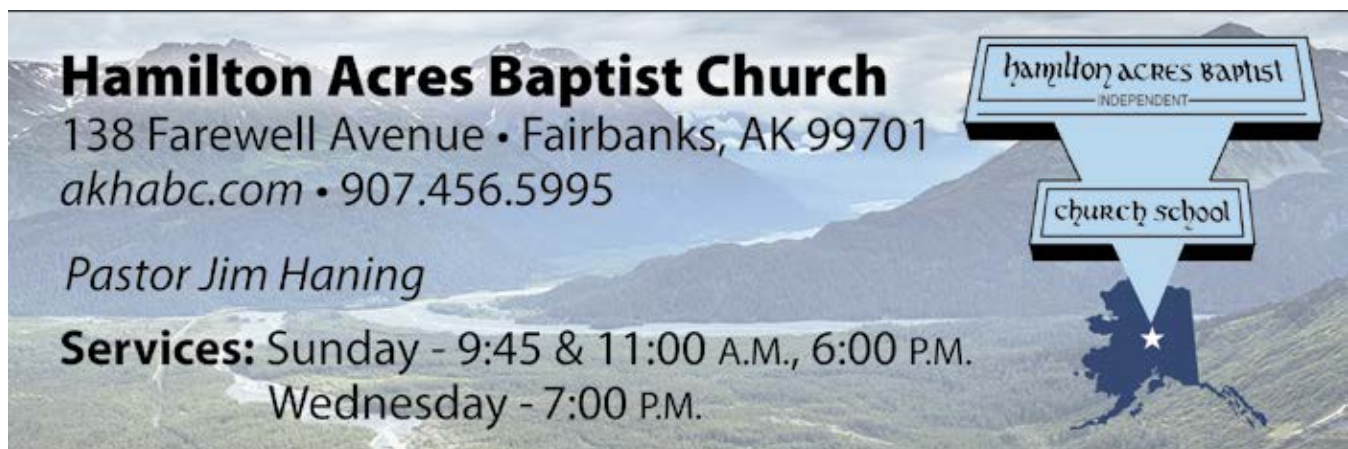
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Does Homework Have to Be Human?

Concerns for Educators, Students, and Parents

In some ways, writing this article was like a homework assignment. It is an essay of sorts, completed by a due date, and meant to be my own work. As part of my research, I fed specific data into ChatGPT, a chatbot that uses a database of information to generate its answers. I asked it several questions about what to include in this article and how to write it, including the request, “Can you suggest 10 possible catchy titles?” The actual title is my own (as is what and how I wrote), but I

pieced it together from key words and phrases in ChatGPT's suggestions.

Was I too lazy to figure out a title? Did I plagiarize ChatGPT and steal its intellectual property, mechanically generated though it may be? These questions are important, and others are asking them as well. Should students complete assignments with the help of artificial intelligence (AI)? Should parents encourage their children to use chatbots like ChatGPT as a tutor? Should a college freshman use AI to write an essay for English 101? Does homework even have to be human? To answer these questions, we must understand AI from a Christian perspective and then consider the benefits and risks when using AI in education.

A CHRISTIAN DESCRIPTION OF AI

Artificial intelligence, by definition, is *artificial*. It is not an actual person. It does not have a soul and is not made in the image of God. It

does not have a conscience and cannot exercise discernment. It is not led by the Holy Spirit to carry out the desires of God. Neither is it led by indwelling sin to carry out desires for evil. At best, AI is merely a *tool*. Its usefulness, therefore, is in the hands of its creators and its users. Whether we eat or drink, we can do so with the tools of forks and cups to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). If we carefully use AI, we can use this tool for His glory as well.

At the same time, AI is *intelligence*, and that intelligence comes from somewhere. Consider ChatGPT. Describing its own “intelligence,” it stated, “ChatGPT is trained on vast amounts of text data from the internet, including books, websites, and other written content.” So, if ChatGPT is a composite intelligence from people who have written online, in print, or elsewhere, ChatGPT will reflect who these people are in its responses. More specifically, it reflects only parts of who these people are, for better or for worse. It also reflects the val-

ues of its “trainers”—those who program the parameters for how an AI responds. An AI will show its programmers’ biases and prejudices as to what *they* believe an AI should say or not—again, for better or for worse.

THE RISKS OF AI FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Whether from the viewpoint of the student, parent, or educator, potential risks come with the use of AI, but that does not mean we should do away with AI altogether. As we inform ourselves of the risks that AI poses, we can counter its misuse and abuse with sound advice about using it responsibly.

First, the use of AI could hinder a student from learning necessary skills: research, analysis, critical thinking, originality, problem-solving, creativity, and more. If a student uses AI to find or complete answers for math, science, or especially a subject like writing, he will hinder his abilities as a student. He might learn the skill of how to use AI, but his personal knowl-

edge and ability to learn will suffer.

If an educator desires to employ AI in the classroom or for homework, parents and educators should supervise its use by students. Schools should develop institution-wide policies that acknowledge the presence of AI, give general guidance on its use, yet leave policies flexible enough for individual teachers to use it or not as they desire.

Second, an unsupervised use of AI can easily tempt students to cheat. Students might use AI to plagiarize an essay or search the internet—whether through a smartphone or other technology—for answers that should be found in a textbook, shortcutting work that they should do themselves. This problem presently plagues high schools and universities throughout the world.

Christian parents and educators should teach students the importance of honesty and truthfulness as they raise their children to reflect Jesus, who is “the truth” (John 14:6).

If cheating occurs or is suspected, parents and educators can avail themselves of programs that are meant to detect the use of AI (e.g., GPTZero). However, just as AI is not perfect, neither are programs that detect its use, and the task of detecting AI use becomes more difficult as AI models become better at sounding human and students become better at prompting the AI.

Third, the use of AI comes with its own limitations. Mentioned already, the content and programming of a given AI can hinder its usefulness due to bias and prejudice. AI can also have “hallucinations,” made-up answers given to satisfy a user with a response. Data is not always accurate. AI is also still novel enough that some schools may have no policies about its use at all. Like parents who did not grow up with AI, educators may be unaware of its growing prevalence, let alone know how to use it, and they may leave students to themselves to use AI without proper guidance.

In and of himself, man has limitations. He is a creature of the Creator. A creation of the creature will suffer further limitations. Perhaps a time-worn maxim applies well to the use of AI: “Don’t be the first to try the new, but don’t be the last of those who do.” AI is likely here to stay, but we should acknowledge its limitations and use it responsibly.

THE BENEFITS OF AI

The risks above may seem enough to frighten parents and educators into doing away with AI altogether. In fact, notable differences seen in work by students who do and do not use AI may warrant this approach. However, if appropriate, wisely using AI as a tool can yield benefits for educators, parents, and students.

First, educators can teach students how to understand and use AI as a tool. The rapid rise and prevalence of AI suggest that educators should teach students how to use AI or at least how to understand it. Some subjects may require little (if any) attention to AI, but an

awareness and ability to use AI will train students to keep up with our rapidly advancing technological world.

Second, educators can employ AI as a tool in the classroom or for student assignments. To do this properly, educators should ensure that students have access to AI, as not all students may have the same resources (e.g., a smartphone, a laptop, or a home computer). Its use should be properly cited or documented as the teacher instructs.

Third, educators can coach students how to use AI, not as a replacement but as an aid to necessary skills, such as research, analysis, and critical thinking. Once a student has mastered these skills for himself, an educator can then help him refine these skills further. As I did with this article, a student can use AI as a collaborator to spark creativity but should cite its use as with any other source.

Fourth, educators can use AI as a tutor. Under the supervision of the educator or

parents, students can ask questions to clarify and review a subject's content for matters they may have missed or may not have understood in the classroom. As noted above, however, the ability for AI to tutor will be only as good as its content and programming allows, and AI can never replace the personal relationship that a student has with his teacher.

In each of the benefits noted above, the key actors are the *educators*. They themselves can benefit from AI, but the benefits of AI for the student depend upon their instruction and guidance. In some homes, the parents are the educators. In others, parents send their children to school. These parents must know what their children are learning and what resources they will use at school. Even for young adults in college, responsible educators will help them understand the institutional policy and give them further guidance as each course demands. Whatever the scenario, educators and their institutions should take the

initiative to give guidance to students about the use of AI and, if appropriate, take advantage of AI to enhance their education.

CONCLUSION

As someone who has formally taught students from the fifth grade to the doctoral level, I realize that the use of AI is not appropriate for every age or every subject. However, like any other tool we should learn how to use it when appropriate and how to use it well. This is all the more urgent because of the rapid pace of AI development and adoption in society. As parents and educators take the lead with AI, recognizing its risks and how to mitigate them, students will benefit and even flourish as they live and learn in our technological age.

David Huffstutler has been the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois, since 2013. He has also served various institutions as a trustee, chaplain, and adjunct faculty. He and his wife Holly have a son and three daughters.





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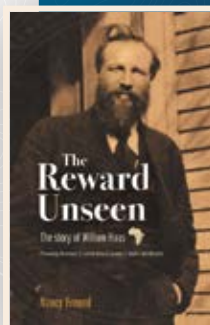


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I electrocuted my dog. It was an accident, of course—a terrible accident. Who in their right mind would purposely electrocute their dog?

The unfortunate incident occurred during one of the most hectic springs of my life. I was directing *The Sound of Music* at school, teaching a full roster of classes, planning my wedding, and dealing with flooding in my basement. There was no end in sight. In fact, meteorologists were calling it the rainiest spring ever in southeastern Wisconsin.

My then-fiancé John and I should have been finalizing the menu for our wedding reception, planning our honeymoon, and setting goals for our future together. Instead, we bought “his and hers” water vacuums and spent every spare moment trying to keep my house (soon to be *our* house) from setting sail down Highway 26. It was pretty stressful. John and I concluded that

if we could survive the flood of '04, our marriage could withstand just about anything.

My dog Bozley, an English springer spaniel, was having a rough spring too. He suffered terribly from storm angst. A sudden drop in the barometric pressure always made him anxious, but the rumbling thunder and crashing lightning that followed catapulted him into a state of utter frenzy. Poor Bozzie!



On the fateful rainy evening in question, I was in the basement water vacuuming. Bozley, embroiled in storm angst, was following me everywhere. I leaned over to adjust the vacuum nozzle, Boz moved in to lick my face, and that's when it happened. He stepped on a crack in the extension cord laying on the wet carpeting and got zapped. He let out a yelp and high-tailed it up the basement steps.

At first it seemed only to have frightened him. Sure, he was wild-eyed and panting, but that was nothing new on a rainy day. The next day, however, was a rare day without rain and Boz was still behaving strangely, so I took him to the vet. The diagnosis was devastating. The dog's insides had been fried and he was dying.

News circulated about Bozley's imminent death and soon his friends and fans were stopping by to show their affection and pay their last respects. Poor Bozzie languished at length upon his sick bed, until one day he seemed to have improved slightly.

Was he really getting better, I wondered, or was it just wishful thinking?

Long story short: Bozley didn't die. He recovered! The only side effect of the electrocution was a near total loss of his hearing, which wasn't all bad. He could now live out his days peacefully, never again having to cope with scary thunder and lightning. In the end, the Lord had used my accidental "shock treatment" to provide a cure for Bozley's debilitating storm angst.

You may be thinking, "What a happy ending to the story!" However, the story doesn't end there.

Day after day, the rain continued to fall, and the basement continued to flood. On the rainiest days, the storm sewers along our street couldn't keep up with it, and a lake would form in my front yard. Yes, a *lake*! Keeping my house from floating away into the Rock River was becoming a full-time job, and there seemed to be no end in sight.

Back then, I had a standing dinner date on Friday nights across town at my parents' house. This par-

ticular Friday evening John was working, so I knew I would be battling the flood waters alone. “I really should stay home and water vacuum,” I thought, “But I hate to disappoint Mom and Dad. I need a little break!” So I opened the basement door to see how bad the flooding was. I flipped on the light switch and heard the sump pump kick in.

“Good,” I thought, “The sump pump will take care of things while I’m gone.” So I flipped the light switch off. Simultaneously the sump pump turned off.

“That’s odd,” I thought. So I turned the light on again and the sump pump started up. Light off—pump off. Light on—pump on. Aha!

A quick investigation revealed that the sump pump was plugged into the only outlet in the basement connected to the light switch at the top of the stairs. Simply plugging the sump pump into a different outlet stopped the flooding. Hallelujah!

A month later John and I got married, and after our honeymoon, it was a great blessing to return to a house with a dry basement.

For thousands of years the citizens of Planet Earth have had a love/hate relationship with rain and storms. But storms are inevitable—both the literal and figurative varieties. Our storms may have nothing to do with weather and everything to do with

family, relationships, health, or finances, to name a few possibilities. But you can rest assured that God is in control and that He can use even our storms for good.

In John 16:33, the Bible reminds us, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Carol Senn Ruffin has been teaching music and theatre at Maranatha Baptist University for 41 years. She is the music director of her church and the host of *Carol's Kitchen*, a monthly cable TV program.



At A Glance

Layton Talbert

The Preservation of Scripture: Do We Still Have God's Words? (Part 1)

Jeremiah 36 records a remarkably vivid illustration of God's preservation of His words. God directed the prophet to write down "all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day" (v. 2).¹ That's a lot of words! Nevertheless, Jeremiah recounted all of God's revelation to his amanuensis, Baruch, who recorded all of God's words to Jeremiah (vv. 1–4). That's *inspiration* and *inscripturation*. Not long after, that very scroll was read in the presence of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, as he sat beside a late fall fire in his winter palace (the "ninth month" in verse 22 is Chislev, corresponding to November-December). How did the king react to all these divine words "against Judah"? As every few columns were read, he coolly sliced them off the scroll with a scribe's knife and fed them to the fire (vv. 22–23). How did God react? He simply commanded Jeremiah,

“Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned” (v. 28). And he did. As a matter of fact, this time “there were added to them many similar words” (v. 32). That’s *preservation*.

The extraordinary example of preservation in Jeremiah 36 illustrates at least two simple but key realities: (1) God displays a determined interest in preserving His words, even when powerful people try to silence them, and (2) God has no difficulty in preserving His words—through whatever means He chooses—even when the first and only copy of them (what scholars call the *autograph*) has been purposely and brazenly destroyed.

How can we be confident that the words we read in our Bibles accurately reflect the words God first gave to Moses or David or Matthew or Paul to write down under inspiration? The answer is this: because God has preserved His word. Why would we believe that? And how would we know that? This two-part column will begin with several broad implications that argue for preservation.

THE FACT OF SCRIPTURE IMPLIES PRESERVATION

Divine self-revelation assumes preservation. Why? God was under no obligation to create, but He did.

Nor was He under any obligation to form creatures in His own image, but He did. Having done so, He was under no obligation to reveal Himself to us or to communicate His purposes or expectations to us. Even after we sinned, God was under no obligation to say or do anything to rescue us from our sin and its consequences; but He chose to *pursue* a self-communicative relationship with fallen humanity. In fact, God chose to see to it that His words were *written down* for the sake of accuracy and access and permanence. Having chosen to do all that, why would God then abandon the entire process of His self-revelation to humanity by failing to preserve His words? Given that succession of divine actions, is it even remotely likely that He would take no steps to preserve His self-revelation for future generations? In fact, we can take that argument one step further.

THE PURPOSE OF SCRIPTURE NECESSITATES PRESERVATION

In 2 Timothy 3:14–17 Paul exhorts Timothy with the reminder that he has known “the holy scriptures” from childhood—which he could not have known had they not been preserved. Why is that important? Because what Paul says in that passage is that the sacred writings are the means of salvation, and that they are essential for the teaching, rebuking, correct-

ing, instructing, and equipping of Christians. In other words, “The Bible was given for a purpose which we might summarize as *enabling the establishment of fellowship with God* [which] involves our *conversion* . . . and our *growth*, as we learn from the Bible how to think and live to please God.”²

That *purpose* of Scripture implies the necessity of its ongoing preservation. After the exodus from Egypt, God directed Moses to record the inspired words of Deuteronomy 8:3: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.” Fourteen centuries later, Jesus cited those words as still an authoritative and necessary basis on which to resist temptation (Matt. 4:4). “Why would [God] give, in written form, information which every human being needs, and then make it impossible for anyone to know it . . . by doing nothing to guarantee that people could access this information?”³

Paul asserts that what was written (and, incidentally, necessarily preserved) in the Old Testament was “*written for our admonition*” and “*written for our learning*” (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). Paul’s argument is not that those passages are useful and instructive because they happen to exist. His argument is that at least part of the *reason* they were written in the first place is because

they were *intended* to be useful and instructive for *later* generations. That very purpose necessitates that preservation be part of the process of God's self-revelation, so that the later generations would have access to it.

"In truth, this line of argument is not just an argument from inspiration to preservation. It is an argument from God's character . . . and humanity's need of the information contained in Scripture to the *likelihood* or *probability* of Scripture's preservation."⁴

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE ENTAILS PRESERVATION

God has incorporated into Scripture multiple commands to read, meditate on, and obey His words.

"Scripture's authority . . . applies to everyone at all times." In other words, "Scripture is the *authoritative manual* for what humans need to know and do to fulfill God's purposes for them in the world."⁵ That enduring authority of Scripture is completely undercut apart from the preservation of Scripture. "How can we submit ourselves to the authority of those divine commands if God does not see to it that they are preserved for each successive generation of His people?"⁶

THE GLORY OF GOD REQUIRES PRESERVATION

One reason God has given His word is to validate His trustworthiness as the God who does exactly

what He has said, and He is determined to validate that not just to His own people, but to all the nations. Here's just one example, in Ezekiel 36:21–36, where God describes the international significance of His restoration of the Jews via the new covenant.

“But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned **among the nations** wherever they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned **among the nations** wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned **among the nations**, which you have profaned **in their midst**; and **the nations shall know** that I am the LORD,” says the Lord GOD, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among **the nations**, gather you out of **all countries**, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and

do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. . . . Not for your sake do I do this,” says the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!” Thus says the Lord GOD: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. . . . Then **the nations** which are left all around you **shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it.**”””

God intends history to vindicate to all the nations that He is the God who does, entirely and exactly, everything He says. That high and holy purpose of God could not be accomplished without the preservation of His words and what He said He would do.

These four points are logical implications of larger theological truths—God’s character, God’s authority, God’s purpose, God’s glory—and they are important arguments as far as they go. For some, however, the bigger question is this: *Does the Bible itself teach a doctrine of preservation?* Even conservative, Bible-believing scholars are divided on the answer to that question. Although they believe that God *has* preserved His

word, they don't all agree on whether the Bible explicitly *teaches* that God would, in fact, do that.

But here's an important point. We do not have an explicit biblical doctrine stating which books are part of the inspired canon or specifically when the canon would close. Nevertheless, the church has come to those conclusions based on the testimony of the providence of God over the facts of history. Likewise, we do not *need* an explicit biblical doctrine of preservation to recognize all the theological arguments and all the historical evidences that God has providentially preserved an accurate and reliable record of His self-revelation.

So, we don't *need* an explicit doctrine of preservation to believe in preservation. But I think we have one. More on that next time.

Layton Talbert is professor of theology and biblical exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. For copies of this article in booklet form, contact eneal@mountcalvary-baptistchurch.org.



¹ Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV.

² Richard Brash, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to How God Preserved the Bible* (Christian Focus, 2019), 21–22.

³ John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Crossway, 2018), 754.

⁴ Feinberg, 754.

⁵ Feinberg, 755.

⁶ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009): 1:51–53.

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Corey A. Pfaffe

God's Way of Giving

Come with me to ancient Jerusalem—the Temple. It's harvest time. Let's watch as a devout Israelite farmer brings his gift in a basket as commanded by Moses. The Levitical priest accepts his basket and sets it down at the altar.

What happens next is recorded in Deuteronomy 26. The grateful and generous farmer tells the priest his story:

My distant ancestor Jacob left the blessed land we stand on today, fleeing a severe drought to live in Egypt. His family entered Egypt as a small band of seventy people warmly received and fled four hundred years later as a multitude of harshly treated slave laborers.

We escaped only because God intervened. He plagued and terrorized the Egyptians until they expelled us from their land. Forty years later His mighty hand again gave us this rich land, including my own family homestead.

This basket of produce is my gift as a token response to all that God has given to me.

Keep watching. Our farmer has paused to pray:

Father in Heaven, I rejoice in You. I give You first and foremost my thanks, my gratitude. I know that my gift of thanks is the only response I can present directly to you. You require nothing of my material possessions.

I do love You though, Father. And I love Your work and Your workers. So, I have given gifts to them. Also, I have given of Your bounty to others who have little—

weary travelers, orphans, and widows—any one You bring to my attention.

Father, You know my heart. I respond by giving in submissive obedience to Your commands and in sincere and genuine love for You and others.

Wasn't that an amazing scene? It was. But it is happening today as well. Followers of Jesus Christ today understanding that God is the source of every good and perfect gift. We have nothing that we have not received—no original gift material. But we delight in being responsive givers.

Four themes regarding giving are pervasive throughout Scriptures. These themes represent *God's Way of Giving*.

There are at least 735 specific references to giving in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 26 offers a complete picture in one place, but we find these truths throughout God's Word.

GOD GIVES TO US

God is the model giver—without equal. Well over half of the references in Scripture to giving relate to giving *by* God *to* men.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). Not only is God the originator of every perfect gift, He initiates the act of giving it, using you and others to accomplish His divine directives.


Peter told believers that God has “given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). God has given you everything you need for this earthly life and for your spiritual life—now and for eternity.

By examining God’s Word, you will find many ways that He has given to both your temporal and your eternal needs. No one else can provide for your *basic needs of life*—your physical life and well-being (Ps. 21:4); rain (Acts 14:17); food, water, and clothing (Matt. 6:25); and the air that you breathe (Acts 17:25).

God's gifts to you include *possessions* (Deut. 8:18; 1 Cor. 4:7), *family* (Prov. 18:22; Ps. 127:3), *peace and security* (John 14:27), and, of course, most of all, your *spiritual life* (Eph. 2:8) and the indwelling gift of the *Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38).

WE RESPOND BY GIVING THANKS

Since God is the supplier of all gift “material” we can only be *responsive* givers. We give out of what we have received from Him. The



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Israelite in Deuteronomy 26 worshipped by *giving thanks* to the LORD and by rejoicing “in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given” (v. 11). The *giving of thanks* is the only way that you can give *directly* to God. He does not need any material thing you might have to offer (Ps. 50:12). Practice thankfulness in your life and in your home. Perhaps even learn to say, “Father, I *give* You thanks.” Jesus *gave* thanks (Matt. 15:36); we certainly should.

WE RESPOND BY GIVING TO GOD’S WORK AND HIS WORKERS

It is my belief that the more we recognize and revel in God’s great gifts, the more we will find joy in giving to God’s work and His workers—our Israelite friend did (Deut. 26:4, 11). It is my personal conviction that Laurie and I should give as God has prospered us (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:12). As New Testament believers we cannot imagine that that could be ten percent or less of our prosperity.

WE RESPOND BY GIVING TO OTHERS

Finally, we ought to give to others, not being stingy with what God has provided. The Scriptures are replete with commands and rewards of generosity toward others. It is a study worthy of your time and enjoyment (Matt. 25:31–46; 1 John 3:17; Mark 9:41; 2 Cor. 9:6; Heb. 13:16; James 2:14–17; Luke 14:12–14; Rom. 12:8).

We need to be generous with God's work and His workers—it is our duty and privilege. We need to attend to the needs of others and not be stingy. But if we will *start* our responsiveness by gratefully giving thanks and worshipping our amazingly benevolent Heavenly Father, I believe we will have a much less difficult time loosening our grip on our financial resources.

Corey Pfaffe serves as the CEO of MinistryCPA, a Certified Public Accounting firm based in Watertown, Wisconsin. The firm works with ministry clients in virtually every US state and every continent. He and his wife Laurie have



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Regional Reports

NEW MEXICO FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

On Friday, October 18, 2024, seven pastors met at Manzano Baptist Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for a day of prayer, fellowship, and encouragement. Their discussion followed an outline of Dr. Les Ollila's book *New Normal*. Pastors shared their new "normal." A new "normal" comes about as we experience changes brought about by sin, death, disappointment, and loss. Many expressed that they were encouraged by the day. If you have not read the book, I would encourage you to do so. I believe you would be encouraged, and many in your church would be encouraged.

Submitted by Dan Mauldin, Regional Coordinator

NEW ENGLAND FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

On October 19, 2024, the eighth New England Foundations Conference commenced with about 110 people in attendance. It was a full day of encouraging preaching on the

theme of “Standing on the Foundation of Faithful Men and Women.” The conference featured five pastors from New England as session speakers. The youth choir presented several musical selections throughout the day, and attendees enjoyed a great time of fellowship and encouragement as new friendships were made and other friendships strengthened.



New England has many wonderful churches, most of which are pretty small, but we rejoice that we can faithfully serve the Lord together in this beautiful region and remind one another that we do not stand alone for the cause of Christ. One of the things we did during the day was to pray for churches in New England in need of a pastor. On behalf of those churches, I would like to extend the challenge to men looking for ministry oppor-

tunities to come to New England and be willing to serve in relative obscurity. We are looking for godly, faithful, conservative men who love God, love Scripture, and who will love people. “Lord, give us New England!”

*Submitted by Taigen Joos,
Regional Coordinator*



CENTRAL FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

The Central FBFI Regional Fellowship held their annual fellowship on October 21–22, 2024, at Faith Baptist Church of Manhattan,

Kansas. Members of Faith Baptist worked diligently to host the meeting while providing all the meals for this two-day conference. “We had a wonderful fellowship with excellent preach-



ing,” remarked David Byford, regional coordinator. The theme based on Acts 13:36 was “Serving Our Generation in Ministry.” Special speakers included Dr. Bruce McAllister from Bob Jones University and Dr. Mark Minnick from Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

The encouraging messages emphasized how Christians can be most effective in this generation. Having attendees from the Central Region as well as others who came a great distance was a true blessing.



Next year's fellowship in October 2025 will be in Wichita, Kansas, with Pastors Dale and Marcus Heffernan.

*Submitted by David Byford,
Regional Coordinator*



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Chaplain's Report

Troy Shoaf

FBFI Chaplains Faithfully Serving Locally and Globally

Over the past several months, our FBFI Chaplains have been steadily engaged in operations around the world and around the community. Here are just a few of the highlights of how our chaplains are being used of the Lord:

1LT Chad Fitts, a Chaplain Candidate with the TXARNG, submits this update:

The Texas Army National Guard plays a significant role in securing the US southern border, particularly in response to increasing concerns over illegal immigration,



drug trafficking, and border security. The Guard's involvement includes surveillance, logistical support, and assistance for federal and state law enforcement agencies. They operate under state orders as part of Operation Lone Star (OLS), which aims to deter and interdict criminal activities along the entire 1,254 miles of the Texas/Mexico border.

As part of this mission, chaplains provide essential



ministry services to the soldiers, offering spiritual support, counseling, and moral guidance. They help maintain the mental and emotional well-being of the troops by leading religious services, conducting individual counseling sessions, and facilitating stress-relief activities.

OLS Chaplains ensure that soldiers have the spiritual resources they need to cope with the challenges of their deployment, fostering resilience and maintaining morale in the face of demanding and sometimes dangerous duties.

CH (CPT) Mark Hanson, **WIARNG** received an Army Commendation Medal during Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) training in June 2024. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for stepping into the role as the Chaplain Officer in Charge (OIC) for the Rotational Support Group (RSG). It was Mark's first opportunity to lead as a Chaplain for a Senior Staff Leadership Team and his first opportunity to manage and mentor four other Religious Support Personnel during the 30-day exercise. During the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee in July, he provided domestic support and served as chaplain. Mark's end-of-service awards from the 1-147th Aviation Battalion included an Army Achievement Medal and the 1-147th AVN Battalion Commander's Coin.



Timothy Hryniewicz, chaplain applicant, received the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (NAM) for his time on board the *USS Leyte Gulf*



while serving as the Ordnance Officer and Gunnery Officer. The *USS Leyte Gulf* (CG 55) was decommissioned on September 27, 2024, after 37 years of naval service. Tim is pictured along with former crew-

member Patrick Dempsey following the decommissioning ceremony. Patrick is a “Plank Owner” having served onboard as a Sonar Technician with the original crew, whereas Timothy is a “Plank Preserver” having served onboard as Ordnance Officer with the final crew. While separated by decades of service, they lived only miles apart, as they both hail from Cheshire, Connecticut. Having this photo opportunity was a special moment for both of them.

CH (CPT) Chris Koehn, USAR recently received the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal,



Overseas Ribbon, and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal following his deployment. He provides this update:

Deployments are never easy, but for chaplains they offer some of the most profoundly fulfilling experiences in ministry. As I traveled through several countries and locations across the Middle East, I found countless opportunities to bring the light and hope of Christ into environments marked by anxiety and uncertainty.

I'm deeply grateful for the Soldiers and Airmen who came to Christ, those who followed in believer's baptism, and others who, having drifted from their faith, found their way back to Him. My time downrange will stay with me forever, and I am especially thankful to my family and ministry for all the prayers and support during those eleven months away. It was a team effort, and I couldn't have done it without them.



CDR Robert Spivey, CHC, USN was presented with his end-of-tour award, the Meritorious Service Medal, at Naval Air Station Key West in July 2024 by NAS Key West Commanding Officer, CAPT Regoli.



Mike Ascher received the “Chief’s Award of Recognition” at a Chesapeake Police Department function. Mike serves as the Chesapeake Police Department Chaplain and leads the department’s

chaplain corps of eleven other chaplains, overseeing their training and scheduling.

Greg Kaminski is a Coast Guard (CG) Auxiliary Chaplain working at the naval base in Florence/Eugene, Oregon. His CG unit just received a unit commendation for their 85th anniversary. Greg and



his wife Janie recently retired from Westside Baptist Church in Eugene.



Ch, 1st Lt. Samuel Jackson, USAFR, completed his chaplain candidacy phase and pinned on his cross on September 20, 2024. He will be attached to 18 WG/HC as an IMA and will be reporting to a unit in Kadena (Japan) to fill the True North Chaplain position. He will also be going to BCC (Basic

Chaplain Course) in August 2025. God opened the door for him to serve at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan. Okinawa is where he grew up, and his mother and brother still live there.

CH (1LT) Keegan Lauzon, ARNG received a promotion and pinned on his cross on August 15, 2024. The ceremony for his pinning/promotion took place while he was conducting annual training this past summer. Those attending



said it was the best promotion ceremony they had attended, and most of them had been in the Army for almost two decades. Keegan is currently in the process of transferring over to the NYARNG, specifically the 1-69th IN BN, which is one of the most decorated units in the Army, aptly named “The Fighting 69th” or “Fighting Irish.” The state chaplain has been a great resource and an encouragement to him and his family. Keegan is excited for this next chapter of his chaplaincy and his new job as a CPE Resident for the VA.





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