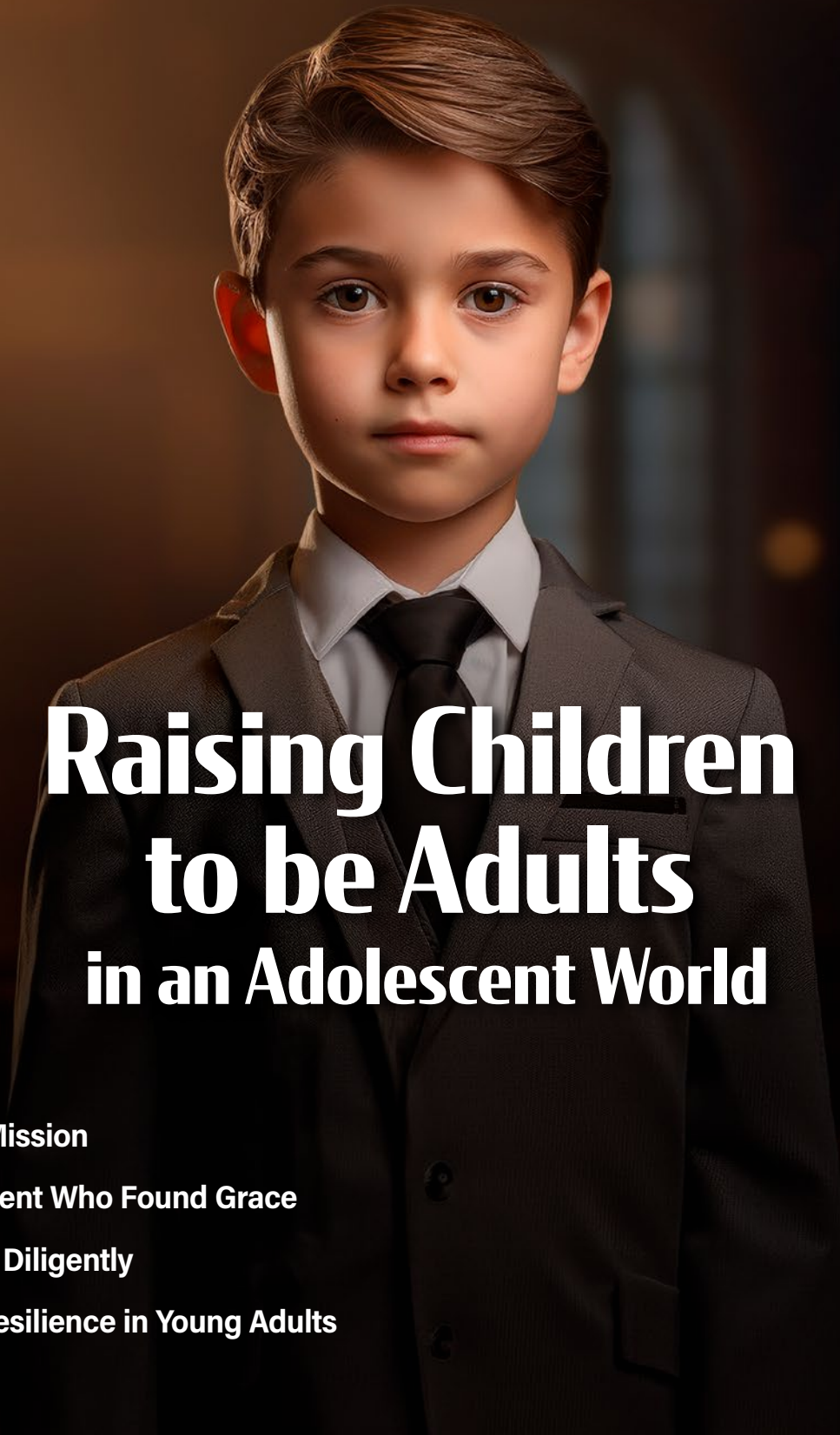


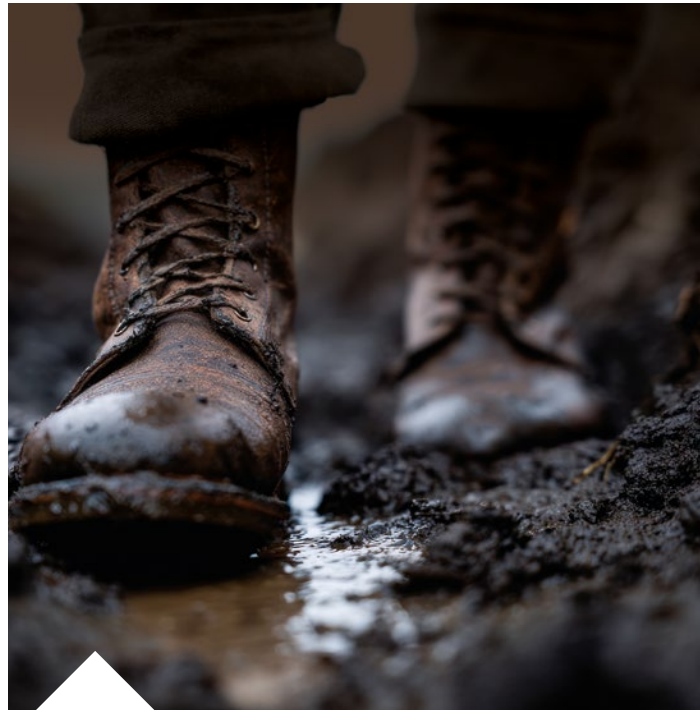
FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

A young boy with brown hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

Raising Children to be Adults in an Adolescent World

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Raising Children to be Adults in an Adolescent World

I can't wait for you to jump into this edition of *FrontLine*. The art of good parenting, like so many of the fine arts, is a fading and distorted art in our culture.

We live in a world where children, whether in age or maturity, lead us. Of course it's that way! Our world has no relationship with the best, wisest Father, our Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. But there is a reality among our fellowship of churches that is sadder still: the families that are ignorantly or purposefully following the culture and failing to raise godly children who are prepared to maturely follow and serve their Lord, boldly affecting their homes, churches, and culture with truth. The antidote for this terrible failure is the deliberate infusion of God and His Word into the equation of childrearing. And this is where it gets exciting, because with God there is hope!

One of the purest descriptions of the maturing of a child into adulthood is found in the description of our Savior's "growing up" years. Luke records that Jesus, in submission to His parents, matured (Luke 2:51–52).

He matured in his humanity. He grew in wisdom—the application of the knowledge of God and His Word to life. He grew in stature—the proper view of His body and its skilled use for life and ministry. He also matured in His relationships. He learned how to rightly relate to God and to man so that both relationships were full of grace (favor). Parents and church families, we must passionately pursue this type of maturity in the children God has given us to raise and reach for His glory. God's work, God's kingdom, and God's glory demand it.

So, jump into the articles. I believe you will be both encouraged and stimulated as you join us in studying the parenting character and skills of Noah, Jochebed, and Zacharias and Elisabeth; listening to the wisdom of Moses; understanding the nuances of mission, purpose, and community in the maturing of children; and considering an "outside the box" opportunity to influence the next generation for Christ.

May God help us to raise kids to be adults in an adolescent world.

David Anderson, Associate Editor

A Boy on a Mission

The home is more than a place of safety and security. It is also a training ground for children. A boy becomes a man with the help of his parents, especially his father, who build his confidence and help him master the needs of manhood. That process has been significantly damaged in our current culture. Fathers are absent. Male spaces have been removed. Manly themes are discouraged. Feminism reigns in the culture. And the church is not immune. Our culture does not want boys to become men, so all too often, they fail to mature.

Men are by nature builders. They construct homes, communities, cultures, governments, and personal legacies. These come about because of a sense of purpose. A man without a mission has not yet biblically matured. Scripture points to a

truth that our modern age has abandoned: men need a mission. In addition, men need to teach their sons how to discover and pursue their own missions. Whether that mission is to lead a family, build a business, serve a church, protect a neighborhood, or advance a cause, it becomes the compass that guides his life through confusion and conflict. At its core, a man's mission is not just his career, a hobby, or a checklist of tasks. It is a vision that directs decisions, fuels discipline, and gives meaning to the difficulties of life.

Without a mission, men and boys often fill the void with distractions: entertainment, addiction, anger, or apathy. These things might numb the pain of aimlessness, but they never replace the deep satisfaction of meaningful responsibility. Purpose calls a man to rise above comfort and live sacrificially and even heroically.

Boys demonstrate their mission-mindedness early. They build things—a tower of blocks, Lego structures, forts of various kinds, tree houses, and a host of others. This is part of God's creative order and should be encouraged. Adam was commissioned to rule over the world as God's representative, for man's dominion is linked to the image of God (Gen. 1:26–28). Although his rule was a failure, it cannot be denied that he ruled.

When God created, He established the foundations of life but left the implementation to Adam. God did not groom every tree, develop the tools that Adam would need, construct dams on the streams, or build a house for Adam and Eve. His last creative act was to create a being that could take God's creation and make it function for humans. The desire to build things is not a result of the sinful nature of men. It is how God created them to reflect His image. God gave Adam a garden to cultivate. Dominion demands creativity. This nature needs to be redeemed, not rejected. Sin does not eliminate human nature, although it does corrupt it. In the past, productivity was a requirement for survival. Today, however, our governmental systems make it easy to be nonproductive. An entire company of governmental leaders does not want competition from family leaders.

Jesus moves men from slaves to sons (Gal. 4:4–7). A mission integrates a man's interests, skills, and circumstances into a personal vision for exercising dominion. We have been led to believe that serving the Lord can take place only in a church, so a man must become a pastor or missionary to have a mission. Scripture, however, has a broader view. All of life is worship, and all work is for the Lord. Colossians 3:23 declares, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Perhaps we need to be reminded that part of Adam's mission was to be a manual laborer in God's garden. Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah are good examples of men whose careers were inherently tied to pagan cultures.

Some men assume that their mission must be laid out by God in full. If it is not, they are afraid to start. However, Adam was given a goal but no specific instructions for achieving it. A mission is not a

map. It is a goal that requires a man to determine how to reach it.

A man can determine his mission by asking key questions. First, what does he enjoy doing? After he creates a list of these enjoyable activities, he needs to address three filters. Does it include a way to provide for his family? Does it give opportunities to love his neighbor? Does it mean he will be able to glorify God?

Second, a man must determine what a possible mission might require in terms of planning, building, and utilization. Would something need to be torn down to accomplish the mission? This process will narrow his list of possible missions.

Third, a man must also consider what this will mean for his family. He must calculate how long his mission might take to accomplish and how it will affect his wife and children. The mission should include spiritual, physical, financial, vocational, and relational goals.

Finally, a mission is not carved in stone. It is a human effort that will often need to be changed over time.

A man will work on that mission until he has achieved his goal. Then, he repeats the process, perhaps again and again, for the rest of his life.

The Bible gives countless examples of men called to a mission—Noah built an ark, Abraham became the father of nations, David led a kingdom, Nehemiah rebuilt a wall, and Paul spread the gospel to the known world. None of these missions were easy. But in each case, the man became who he was *through* the pursuit of his purpose. His mission gave his life shape—and ultimately legacy.

Likewise, history celebrates men who found their "why" and poured themselves into it, from inventors and reformers to fathers and pastors. They didn't drift aimlessly. They knew what they were called

to do, and they did it with everything they had.

God made men to live in relationships. Sexual difference forms the strong bonds of marriage. Sexual sameness forms the strong bonds of friendship. David and Jonathan epitomize this male intimacy (2 Sam. 1:26). Satan can twist this need for brotherhood into evil gangs that destroy rather than defend, consume rather than produce, occupy instead of build, and rape rather than marry. Proverbs 1:10–19 warns young men about the danger of "gangs" even in Old Testament times. Fathers need to direct their boys away from such destructive connections.

Boys are mission-driven, but they must be trained to direct their mission-mindedness. Boys don't stumble into a purpose-filled life. They need help, guidance, and modeling. And there's no one better suited to provide that than a father or a committed male mentor when the father is missing.

Creating boys with a mission is a key task for a father or father figure. A good start is to ask questions, knowing that the younger the boy, the less able he is to answer these questions wisely. But talk about them anyway:

- What kind of man do you want to be?
- What interests and abilities do you think God has given you?
- What problems in the world stir your heart?
- Who or what can you help, build, serve, or defend?

These questions can help shape a boy's heart. They teach him that life is not just about amusement—it's about *assignment*. And while his mission may change in specifics as he grows, the core goal remains the same: to live for something bigger than himself.

BOYS ARE MISSION-DRIVEN, BUT THEY MUST BE TRAINED TO DIRECT THEIR MISSION-MINDEDNESS. BOYS DON'T STUMBLE INTO A PURPOSE-FILLED LIFE. THEY NEED HELP, GUIDANCE, AND MODELING. AND THERE'S NO ONE BETTER SUITED TO PROVIDE THAT THAN A FATHER OR A COMMITTED MALE MENTOR WHEN THE FATHER IS MISSING.

HELP YOUR SON FIND A MISSION

Model your own mission. The most powerful lesson is a lived example. God commanded the Old Testament saints to “love the LORD thy God,” keep His words “in thine heart,” and then “teach them diligently unto thy children” (Deut. 6:4–7). When a father pursues the mission God has given him, his son can see how those accomplishments affect his father. He sees his dad serve and sacrifice to fulfill his mission, accomplish something, and then start over on a new mission. He can recognize the joy that accomplishment brings.

Talk to him about calling and purpose.

Ask your son about his passions, interests, and convictions. Don’t pressure your son to fulfill a vision you never accomplished; you cannot relive your life through your son. Don’t mock his early dreams. If your seven-year-old tells you he wants to be an astronaut, take him out at night and point out the planets and constellations, talk about the moon, and even take a vacation to Cape Canaveral. Yes, he may change his mind a dozen times, but eventually, he will begin to see what God wants for him. Paul instruct-

ed Timothy not to neglect his “gift” (1 Tim. 4:14) but to “stir up the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6). Show your son how God uses ordinary men for extraordinary missions.

Challenge him with responsibility. Boys grow into men when they are given real work to do and people to care for. We heated our house with wood, and my boys grew up learning to haul, split, and cut wood, gaining increased ability and responsibility and learning to use the appropriate tools at an appropriate age. Don’t shield your son from difficulty or failure. David gathered the materials for the temple, but Solomon was given the mission to build it: “And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it” (1 Chr. 28:20). As your son begins to develop a vision for his future, do all you can to prepare him for that mission.

Encourage courage. A mission involves risk; not everyone succeeds. Fathers are instructed to nurture their children without frustrating them (Col. 3:21). Loving correction and instruction result in confidence, resilience, and mission-mindedness. Your son will probably change directions

several times, but you should encourage each step he takes. This does not mean that you should not warn him of potential problems, but you should keep an open mind to his desires.

Pray with him. Show him that prayer is an integral part of mission-forming, not a last resort when failure seems imminent. Teach him to seek God’s guidance through a correct understanding of God’s Word, bathed in prayer.

Men with a mission shape the world. They resist the laziness, consumerism, and despair of the culture around them. They love their families, serve their communities faithfully, and endure hardship with hope. But even more powerful than their own legacy is the legacy they build into the next generation. A boy who learns to live with purpose becomes a man who can lead with strength.

Larry Oats teaches theology and related subjects at Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary. He enjoys writing and traveling with his wife to visit his twelve grandchildren.



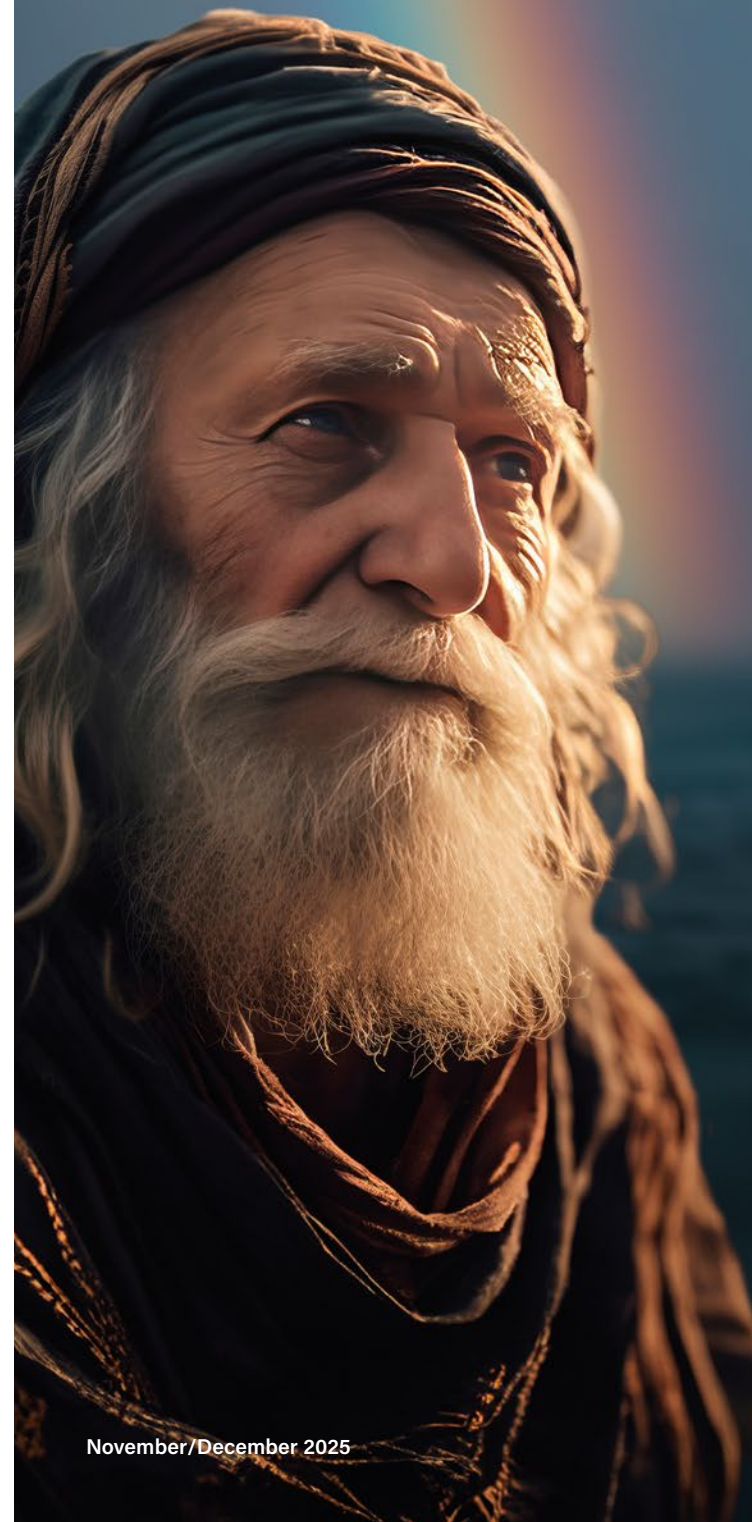
RAISING
CHILDREN
TO BE ADULTS

Steve Love

Noah

A Parent Who Found Grace

Genesis 6:8



Is it possible that Noah is better known for his ability as a builder than for his actions as a believer? This man, however, raised three sons in *the* worst environment. Their world was so morally broken that God saw the need for retribution, instead of repair.

How did this man nurture three sons and engage three future daughters-in-law so that they melded into a family that was remarkably countercultural, out-of-step, “weird” according to the standards of their day? What caused this father to devote 120 years to something utterly contrary to conventional lifestyles and still “sell” this vision to his family? More precisely, how does a parent guide children in a broken world, helping them focus on a different and unseen world—God’s world?

In relation to the cataclysmic, worldwide nature of the Flood and the fact that Noah and his family as sole survivors would be the ones to repopulate the earth, the Bible says comparatively little about this person named Noah and even less of his parenting style. Yet when events reached a pinnacle, Genesis 7:13 states, “In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark.” Clearly, when the choices of life mattered most, Noah had trained his family to make choices that mattered most. Again, as a parent, how did this happen?

Two verses within the Genesis 6 account could easily be overlooked in the flow of the narrative, yet they give great insight into two very important parenting tenets. We should not minimize them.

Genesis 6:8 reveals a *prominent parenting principle* stated simply: “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.” Then follows what could be termed a *prominent parenting practice* recorded in the next verse, which testifies that “Noah walked with God.” One is a *reliance* on God, while the other is embodied in a *relationship* with God. Admittedly and contextually, these two verses don’t necessarily present a cause and effect that resulted in Noah’s parenting style, or the reason Noah’s family embraced his vision. However, these two verses substantiate two truths that are paramount to biblical parenting.

In the broadest and in the most specific terms, biblical grace is that which God offers to a person who is incapable of providing it for himself. Parents who think they can gain a child’s heart without utilizing God’s grace may be able to control the outward behavior of that child, but they will not awaken that child’s heart toward the “arks” of life that God is willing to provide as a means of escape. Likewise, we should recognize that modeling a walk with God is vitally important in giving one’s child a visual pattern of what is being taught within the home.

WHAT NOAH HAD: A RELIANCE ON GOD

What Noah had was the “grace of God,” which is what every believing parent has. But is it possible that today’s believer tends to see grace as only a salvific gift rather than a sanctifying union with God? Grace is received only after a person becomes aware that no human effort or ability can meet the need. Therefore, parents, who somehow believe that they can parent a child without admitting total inability, do not comprehend how broken their child is, how broken they as parents are, and how broken their world is. Grace parenting is necessary if we are to impact our children aright.

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Hebrews 11:7 presents a connection between what Noah had—grace—and the impact it had on his own family. The passage explains, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” It appears that what Noah found in God had a direct impact in providing a rescuing element for his family.

WHAT NOAH DID WITH WHAT HE HAD: A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Genesis 6:9 states what Noah did with that gift of grace: “Noah walked with God.”

Commentator Derek Kidner notes, “In a corrupt world *Noah* emerges not merely as the best of a bad generation, but as a remarkably complete man of God.”¹ Verse 9 says he was “a just man and perfect.” “Perfect,” as W. H. Griffith Thomas explains, “means upright, genuine, and has no reference to the absence of sin.”² The verse says he was “perfect in his generations,” which, Kidner says, “could be rendered ‘(alone) among his contemporaries.’”³

He is one of two men recorded as having “walked with God,” a term indicating habitual action. Thomas observes, “It meant courage and independence, for no one else was walking in that way.”⁴ After the Lord presents plans for the ark, the chapter concludes, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (v. 22). His walk produced obedience.

Titus 2 reveals a dynamic truth. The context is that of modeling what grace teaches. Paul exhorts the older generation—“the aged men” and “aged women”—“that they may teach the young.”

Then in verses 11–12 he summarizes what grace teaches us, saying, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” Essentially he is stating that Christian living is a direct result of grace.

Noah “walked with God” as a result of finding God’s grace, and this model gave his family and his entire community a visible target for more than a century. The example of walking with God put flesh into the philosophy, example into the exhortation, living into the lecturing, and relationship with the rules.

Grace awakens faith and prompts obedience. The true test of grace is not that its instructions enlighten one’s mind, but that its instructions conquer one’s will. The same grace that appeared to Noah appeared to the people of Noah’s time, but Noah and his family availed themselves of that grace.

It should be noted that this in no way guaranteed that Noah was a perfect parent or, for that matter, a perfect person, which is precisely why grace is found in his life. It also did not guarantee that Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives would heed his admonitions, just as no parent in any age can dictate parenting outcomes.

When Scripture records that Noah walked with God, it is identifying one who was aligned with God’s agenda, oriented toward that which is eternal rather than wandering toward worldly “vain deceit” (Col. 2:8). Hebrews 11 spotlights individuals such as Noah who “by faith” surrendered their wills and in doing so “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were

persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v. 13).

These valiant souls esteemed the reproach of Christ as “greater riches” than earthly treasures (v. 26). They firmly believed that God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (v. 6). They became “heir[s] of the righteousness which is by faith” (v. 7). Despite the consequences, they resolutely followed God. These are convicting examples we should all emulate, especially as parents.

Awareness of one’s need for grace does not solve everything in parenting; faith and obedience must be modeled. Finding parenting grace and walking with God should be practiced as key truths in the journey of rescuing the upcoming generation from the lures of the temporal.

Biblical parenting cannot be implemented without the grace of God.

Biblical parenting cannot be effectual without a walk with God.

Steve Love, having pastored nearly forty years, now serves on the Bible faculty at Maranatha Baptist University, where he has also enjoyed serving in interim pastorates. He and his wife were raised in ministry families and are blessed to have continued the legacy with ministry-minded children.



¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Inter-Varsity, 1967), 87.

² W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1946), 73.

³ Kidner, 87.

⁴ Thomas, 73.

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Teach Them Diligently

Someone has said, “Christianity is always one generation from extinction.” Israel faced the same problem in Old Testament times. At the end of his life, Moses reached out to pass the baton of faith to coming generations (Deut. 6:1–2). The earlier generation of Israelites, having suffered a failure of faith at Kadesh-Barnea, perished in the wilderness under God’s judgment.

Moses wrote Deuteronomy to guard the coming generations from making the same mistake. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructed Israel what, where, when, and how to teach their children. We can learn much about childrearing from this chapter.

WHAT TO TEACH

Chapter 5 of Deuteronomy reviews and expands on the Ten Commandments. Chapter 6 focuses on the first commandment. Verse 5 states the Great Commandment, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

In the Jewish list of the Commandments, the first is “I am the LORD thy God.” The challenge to ancient Israel was polytheism. Verse 4 is the Shema, which is at the core of Judaism: “the LORD . . . is one.” This statement is not

just a statement of fact, but a slogan, asserted with great emotion.

The Shema also denies henotheism, the worship of one god while conceding that other gods exist. The equivalent of henotheism today would be the supposition that all belief systems are equally valid.

The identity of God serves as the basis for exhortations throughout the chapter.

- Don’t forget the Lord (v. 12)
- Fear the Lord your God (v. 13)
- Don’t go after other gods (vv. 14–15)
- Don’t tempt the Lord your God (v. 16)
- Keep His commandments (vv. 17–18)

Imparting information about God is a means to an end. The end is for the next generation to fear God. Fearing God entails loving and obeying Him. Verse 5 stresses that worship of God is more than outward ritual. The whole person, including body, mind, and emotion, is involved. Obeying presupposes knowing God’s commands and being motivated to follow them. This motivation is both positive and negative. Forgetting the Lord leads to dire consequences (vv. 12, 14, 15). Obedience leads to prosperity and security (vv. 17–19, 24–25).

WHERE TO TEACH

God ordained the home, the foundational unit of society, as the first and chief institution to train children to love and obey God.

The ancient Israelite home was the center of life. Daughters worked with their mothers to learn to be housekeepers. Maintaining life meant preparing food and making clothing, very time-intensive tasks since modern conveniences were lacking. Fathers taught their sons their trade, usually farming, which provided a living for the family. The culture of the time required mothers and fathers to spend many hours each day with their children, providing many opportunities to pass on their faith to their children.

Our society is not organized like the ancient world. While we have more resources than the ancients, such as readily available books (especially the Bible), Christian schools, and educational materials from a Christian perspective, we generally don’t have time to interact with our children as much as the ancients. Nevertheless, although we can delegate some of the work, we cannot delegate the responsibility. God has commissioned parents, preferably reinforced by grandparents and the church, to pass on the faith to the next generation.

WHEN TO TEACH

Moses employs a common Old Testament figure of speech, merism, to mark out when the teaching is to take place. A merism is a pair of contrasting words that implies completeness, as in the idiom “search high and low.” Verse 7 says to teach “when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” In other words, we must teach our children everywhere and all the time.

While we may not spend all day quoting Bible verses, we should meditate on God’s words all day. We must always interpret life situations from a biblical perspective. Our responses to both prosperity and adversity should teach our children to trust and obey God. The danger of prosperity is that we will forget God and act as though we are not dependent on Him (vv. 10–15). The danger of adversity is that we will become bitter against God (vv. 16–19).

HOW TO TEACH

Teach them diligently. Some teaching is intentional. We can plan times of family worship and instruction. This teaching does not need to be elaborate or lengthy. We should consider the child’s attention span. A few minutes is enough for a toddler. Younger children need visual

aids. Longer times that allow for interaction are appropriate for older children. Outside of planned events, incidental teaching may be even more effective than intentional teaching, as our children see us navigating the challenges of life in accord with God’s instructions.

In verses 8 and 9, Moses commands specific teaching tools. We cannot be sure exactly what he had in mind. The Jews from Jesus’ day up to our time interpreted Moses’s words to refer to phylacteries and mezuzahs. The former are leather boxes containing Scripture portions and are worn on the wrist or the forehead. Mezuzahs are small boxes containing Scripture portions and are mounted on the doorpost of the home. A good modern equivalent would be Scripture verses on tablets hanging on the walls of our home.

While outward symbols, such as a cross on a neckless, are commendable, our devotion to God should be evident by our actions and attitudes without the outward adornments (Matt. 23:5).

Beginning in verse 20, Moses instructs us to prepare to answer our children when they want to know the significance of God’s commands. Moses rehearses Israel’s national salvation experience, the exodus from Egypt (vv. 21–23).

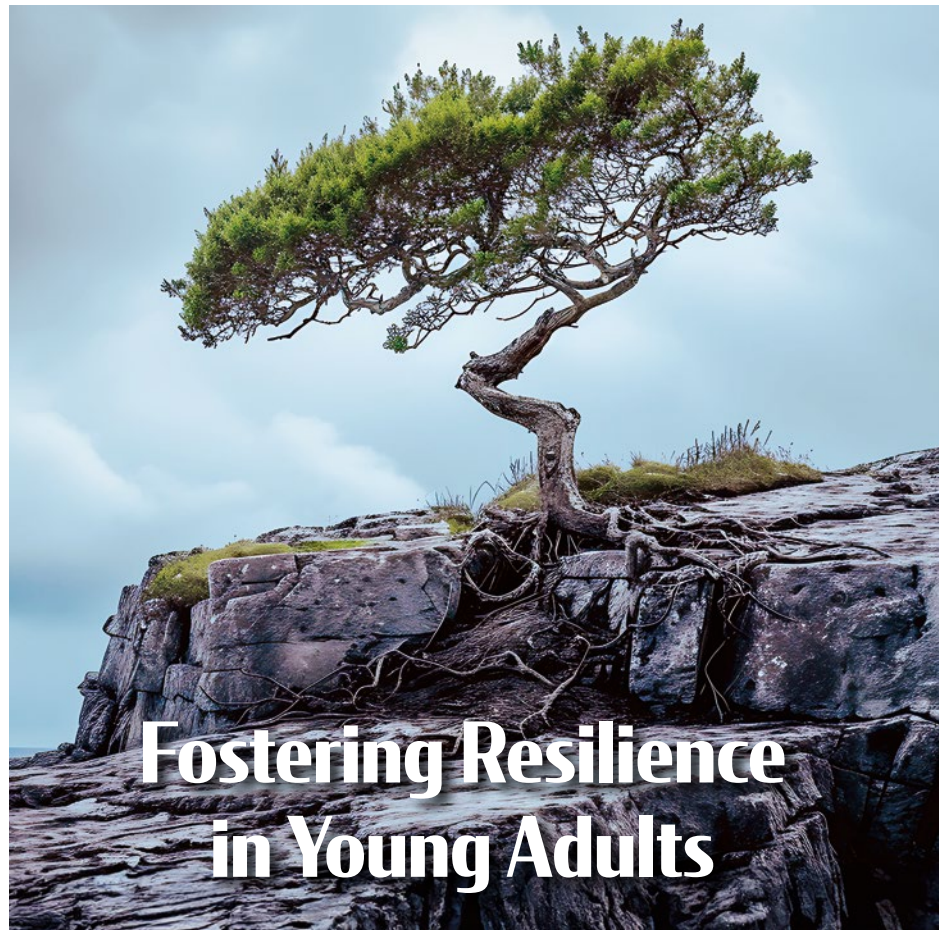
History did not begin on the day of our birth. We are part of a story that began with the plan of God in eternity. Our children need to hear our own testimony of salvation and how God has worked in our lives over a long period of time. Our children need to hear about God’s special providences in our lives. Such a history, honestly told and with a focus on God, will help to kindle love and trust in God in the hearts of our children.

The old saying, “Those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it,” has a corollary. Those who remember God’s gracious dealings with His people in the past can have a faith emboldened to live for God and enjoy His presence and protection in the future. By God’s grace, our children can have that kind of future.

Since retiring from twenty-one years of missionary service in Hungary, **David Potter** has been an adjunct professor of New Testament at Maranatha Baptist University. He and his wife, Jean, enjoy reading, travel, and spending time with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



* The word *faith* is often used in two senses. Faith refers to our subjective trust in God (Rom. 4:5). Faith is also the factual objective content of what we believe (Jude 3). Here I mean both senses of the word.



Fostering Resilience in Young Adults

I sat around a table this summer with local ER nurses, social services, and community youth advocates to discuss the role each of us has with the teens and young adults who are struggling in our community. Much of the talk focused on the rise of reported mental health concerns in teens and young adults. As those at the table related what they saw in their various fields, they mentioned the lack of perceived resilience.

Resilience is the ability to successfully adapt to situations that we may not like or choose. It is the ability to keep pushing toward a goal even when obstacles get in our way. An example is the drive to complete a homework assignment on time even though we may be battling a cold. Another example is the willingness to reach out and encourage a friend even though that friend may have not responded in the way we wanted the last time we reached out. In public universities, this lack of resilience is

seen in students' response to having speakers on campus with whom they have differing views. Rather than simply avoiding the assembly, college students have staged protests to ban differing voices from being heard on their campus. Lack of resilience has led to a neglect of responsibilities. Many reasons have been proposed, from the effects of a worldwide epidemic to a generation growing up more connected to their devices. The world is desperately seeking answers to help teens cope with mental health struggles and build resilience to push through difficult circumstances.

As I sat around that table with community advocates this summer and then read the material they distributed, I was encouraged more and more that Scripture has the answer for these teens and young adults! These caring community leaders are attempting to help these teens and young adults find purpose in life and a community of support.

God's Word specifically speaks to these issues of purpose and community. A biblical understanding of "purpose" and "community" can help teens and young adults be resilient.

WHAT IS THE BELIEVER'S PURPOSE?

Believers should be coming alongside teens and young adults and helping them understand their God-given purpose. By purpose, I mean more than a specific task, more than their major in college. What is their overall driving mission? What is their purpose? Why are they here? What reason did God have for creating them and placing them when and where He did? Succinctly, to glorify Him (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9; Ecc. 12:13–14). God created mankind so that we might give others a right view of Him. Closely tied to purpose, then, must be a growing knowledge of God. If we do not know God, we can certainly not give others the right view of God. We must know of God's love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness so that we can give others the right opinion of God's character. This is Paul's prayer for the believers at Colosse: that they might know God, that knowledge of Him would impact how they live, and that they would "walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:9–10).

Why is purpose so important? If we misunderstand purpose, we will constantly be frustrated when the outcome isn't what we intended. I recently purchased a home and have been learning the joys of home improvement. As I installed blinds, I used a power drill to help me complete the task. The drill—a small tool that spins quickly—was the right tool for the job. If I had instead used my kitchen mixer—which is another tool that spins quickly!—to help me install the blinds, I would have caused much frustration—and a mess! The mixer was never intended to help me install blinds. I will find success only with the tools as I use them for their intended purpose. God created me to glorify Him. My life (tool) will bring me joy and success only as I use it for its intended purpose. If I believe my life purpose is to teach piano, yet I develop arthritis and lose the ability to play, I will get discouraged and lose all

joy. However, if I understand my life purpose is to glorify God, my purpose can still be fulfilled even if I lose the ability to play! To expect teaching piano to fulfill me will bring only frustration when it does not bring me complete joy. I will be most happy and content as I am fulfilling my purpose (doing what God intended) by bringing glory to God.

David knew his purpose was to glorify God. No external circumstance would shake that purpose. He was a young shepherd when he had the opportunity to glorify God through difficult circumstances. Israelite soldiers compared their stature and weapons to the stature and weapons of the enemy. David came upon the same situation but compared the enemy's stature and weapons to the size and ability of his God! In that moment of difficulty, David chose to glorify God by giving his brothers, his countrymen, and the enemy a right opinion of his God (1 Sam. 17:23–50). David's reason for his resilience is given in 1 Samuel 17:46: "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." David's purpose dictated his direction in the middle of difficult circumstances.

As you seek to help teens and young adults within your sphere of influence, encourage them to follow you as you follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Let them see you glorify God. God has given each of us unique opportunities and circumstances to glorify Him—to give others the right opinion of God. Help your teens and young adults see God at work (even in difficulty!) so that they might give others the right opinion of God. I see this exemplified in the life of a coworker. She is currently battling her own serious health struggles. Yet, she consistently looks for opportunities to interact with students and share the goodness of God. God's goodness does not change if it is an easy health day or a hard health day. She can share the joy of the Lord because present circumstances do not change the character of her God. She glorifies God by giving these students the right opinion of God's goodness.

WHERE IS THE BELIEVER'S COMMUNITY?

God created us as relational beings. In the Creation account we see that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). God has placed me within a community of believers for my good and His glory. My community

AS YOU SEEK TO HELP TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITHIN YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, ENCOURAGE THEM TO FOLLOW YOU AS YOU FOLLOW CHRIST (1 COR. 11:1).

(the church) is part of God's good plan in my life as others invest in me and I in others (Titus 2). Having grown up in a pastor's home, I was taught the importance of church early on. I knew that Scripture commanded regular church assembly (Heb. 10:25). However, it wasn't until I *didn't* have the opportunity to assemble regularly with my church that I really understood the importance of my church. During the COVID-19 shutdown, one of the aspects of life that I missed most was gathering with my local church. I'm thankful for the technology that gave access to messages and music online, but I missed fellowshiping with other believers in my community. This should not have surprised me as it did, for God created me to be relational.

Titus 2 teaches us that God did not intend for believers to grow in isolation. We would never expect a child to learn to read without having exposure to written language through others. By the time children learn to read, they have had many individuals (parents, grandparents, babysitters, nursery workers) read out loud to them. They have observed others and now have a desire to learn to read for themselves. In a similar way, God has given the church the unique responsibility to teach "younger" ones what it means to walk with God. Titus 2:1–8 refers to the responsibilities of the older men and older women within the church body. This passage is not specifically referring to the responsibilities of *parents*, but of other individuals within the church. These individuals are commanded to come alongside "younger" men and women and teach them what it looks like to live out a life that brings glory to God.

This aspect of biblical community (the church) can help teens and young adults persevere and be resilient as they work alongside and rub shoulders with others who have years of testimony of a faithful God to display. Hebrews 12:1–2 is a great example of this. After reflecting on the faithfulness of God through many individuals who faced difficult circumstances (Heb. 11), the writer of Hebrews encourages the reader to "run with patience the race that is set before

us" (12:1). Teens and young adults can be encouraged to keep pushing through circumstances they would not choose in pursuit of a goal that cannot be altered (the glory of God!) as they see testimony of God's faithfulness in the lives of those within their biblical community—the church! As "older" men or women, then, we must look for opportunities to share God's faithfulness. We must be faithful to teach, encourage, and admonish. As an "older" one in the church, look for opportunities to connect with those who are younger. Invite them to help you teach a Sunday School class or work in Bible school with you. Invite them to come with you as you bake a meal for a shut-in. Find ways to connect with younger individuals in your church. Connecting in and of itself is not the end goal; rather, use that connection to point them to a deeper relationship with Christ.

As believers, God has given each of us "younger" Christians to influence for His glory. Those local ER nurses, social service workers, and community youth advocates I met with earlier this summer sought to help teens by helping them find a purpose and a community. God's Word has the answers to questions of purpose and community. We each have opportunities to help foster resilience—encouraging teens and young adults to keep pushing forward even when obstacles get in the way. We can do this by helping them understand their purpose to glorify God and helping them see the community of believers and God's faithfulness within their local church.

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A Mother's Faith: The Forge of a Biblical Leader

The grand exploits of the patriarch Moses changed the world in fundamental and familiar ways through the arching storyline of the Bible. But the original story of this great hero of faith begins with the determined faith of his parents, demonstrated in desperately perilous times.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” (Heb. 11:23)

This marvelous foundation was set for the life of Moses by his parents. And while “his parents” get the credit in Hebrews 11, I think we all know who the real hero of this story is! Consider, from the brief glimpse provided in Exodus, the remarkable faith of this godly mother:

“And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.” (Exod. 2:1–4)

In this passage, Moses’ mother is the primary actor, but she is not the central character of the story. In fact, her name is never mentioned in Exodus. Moses records his mother’s name once, in Numbers 26:59, as a passing reference in the genealogy of the Levites.

“And the name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister.” (Num. 26:59)

Like most mothers, she deserves more credit than we give her!

THE LOVING COMPASSION TO KEEP HER BABY

For three months, she hid her newborn baby from prying eyes. The Egyptian pharaoh ordered that every Jewish male baby be killed by the Hebrews. The children of Israel lived under a horrific threat and deplorable conditions at the time:

“And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour. And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives . . . and he said, When ye do the office of

a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. . . . And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.” (Exod. 1:13–16, 22)

No living Hebrew had ever known anything but slavery in Egypt. Under those circumstances, imagine the spirit of this mother envisioning something better for her son. She risked her life to bring a son into that dark world.

In our day, so many children are never given the chance to live.

Consider some of the top reasons given by over one million women who tragically choose abortion in modern America each year:¹

- Not financially prepared to raise a child (40%)
- Not the right time in life (36%)
- Issues with partner (31%)
- Interferes with future plans for education or career (20%)
- Not emotionally or mentally prepared (19%)
- Unable to provide a “good” life (12%)

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Contrast that with Jochebed's godly determination in those dark days to raise her son to be a man whose life and testimony would impact the world for good. Some people see nothing around them but futility and despair. God's people must see with the eyes of faith and cling to the belief that the Creator is still at work in the world.

A DESPERATE PLAN TO SAVE HER BABY

What atrocities had God's people witnessed in the wicked culture of Egypt? The text indicates that the Hebrew midwives were subverting the Egyptians' orders, and God was blessing their efforts. Technically, Jochebed complied with the order that all male babies be "cast into the river." Jochebed was determined to protect her son.

"And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children." (Exod. 2:5–6)

No doubt, the pharaoh's daughter had an established routine that was known to Jochebed. Her careful preparation of the "ark" indicates that she had a creative, faith-based plan in mind. Even in the most desperate circumstances, faith drove her plan. Consider the features of a faith-based plan:

- Jochebed's faith required **courage** to take **risks**. It was an audacious plan with an uncertain outcome.
- Jochebed's faith led her to personal **work**. God worked, but Jochebed did her part.
- Jochebed's faith required **persistence** to stay and closely watch. She remained personally engaged and intensely focused.
- Jochebed's faith inspired **others**. Miriam, guided by her mother's example, demonstrated initiative and courage by approaching the pharaoh's daughter.
- Jochebed's faith was **rewarded**. Not only was Moses' life saved, Jochebed was *paid* to raise him!

THE TENDER CARE TO RAISE HER BABY

"Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it." (Exod. 2:7–9)

Jochebed knew her days with her child were very limited. The text implies her time with him was only until he was weaned—probably only through his primary years. But those formative years with her son gave her the opportunity to influence the course of his life, and she took full advantage of every moment. Her tender care laid a foundation that sustained him in Pharaoh's court (and beyond).

The time all parents have with their children is limited. God's Word calls us to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). We can hope to have a few more years than she had, but we must all give them up too soon. Maximize every moment with your children. Those daily opportunities like bedtime prayers, family devotions, and conversations during meals and car rides instill godly values that endure (2 Tim. 3:15).

Our children do not belong to us; they belong to the Lord. We must raise them to function as independent adults. This perspective keeps the focus on God's will for their lives. Raising independent disciples is the goal, as Jochebed equipped Moses to stand firm against the world. Godly parents teach practical skills and biblical truths, fostering independence and faith to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1:10). By investing in these formative years, we prepare children to follow God confidently, trusting that our efforts will bear fruit.

THE GODLY WISDOM TO BUILD HER SON'S FAITH

On trial before the high priest for "blasphemous words against Moses, and against God" (Acts 6:11), the early church deacon Stephen brilliantly preached through the entirety of Israel's formative history. As he relates the original story of Moses, Stephen emphasized the education that Moses

received as a young prince in the house of Pharaoh.

"And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." (Acts 7:21–22)

Imagine how overwhelmingly powerful the indoctrination from the Egyptian royal academy would have been. Not only did Moses receive the "best" education on earth, but it was packaged with a message of infinite appeal to human nature: you are the son of a god! The Egyptian belief system elevated the royal family to the status of deity, something that every created being has aspired to from the very beginning (Gen. 3:5; Isa. 14:13).

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:24–27)

And yet Moses rejected all the palace had to offer in favor of identifying with slaves. He knew the persecution that decision would bring from Egypt. Perhaps he did not anticipate that even the Hebrews would reject him! Through it all his faith remained resolute, which is a powerful testament to the foundation his mother laid in her short window of opportunity. Everything he knew of the one true God was taught to him in those few short early years with his mother.

Parents, especially mothers, have a strong influence—either positive or negative—during a child's early years that will last throughout their adult life.

- A child raised in an environment of profanity will likely speak the same way.
- Children of alcoholics and drug addicts often (53%) struggle with substance abuse later in life.²
- Children raised in a home without a place for God will likely (74% and up) have no place for Him when they are grown.³

Of course, the world has no reservations about influencing our children. Every social effort to ameliorate the indoctrination of wickedness is characterized as "censorship" and "book banning" fascism. Even churches have limited ability to combat the world if the principles of God's Word are not reinforced in the home environment. God's intended forge of faith is the Christian home, where a mother and father model godly faith and intentionally train their kids in the things of God!

Truly, faith is not inherited. Every individual must establish and grow in personal faith in Christ. But a home that is centered on Christ, intentionally teaching biblical values and consistently modeling Christlike character qualities, will effectively transmit a godly character that will live on in the legacy we leave our children. I am eternally grateful for my own godly mother, Gayle, and for my wife, Dana, both of whom held the role of "mom" sacred and raised their children to follow Christ.

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." (Prov. 31:28)

The unsung hero of Moses' faithful life was his mother, Jochebed. She risked her life to bring him into the world. She

executed a faith-based plan to save his life, and God rewarded her with the precious opportunity to raise him during his formative years. And she maximized the time she had to instill in him a love for God and his people. From that foundation, the humblest man who ever lived led God's people out of slavery and to the Promised Land. From the Hebrews, the Lord Jesus Christ came to save people from every race and tongue. Jochebed's faithfulness forged Moses into the leader God used to change the course of history.

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¹ M. Antonia Biggs et al., "Understanding Why Women Seek Abortions in the US," *BMC Women's Health* 13 (2013), art. 29, <https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6874-13-29>; Lawrence B. Finer et al., "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative

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³ Pew Research Center, "Modeling the Future of Religion in America," <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>; Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), "Religious Change in America" (2023), <https://prri.org/research/religious-change-in-america/>.



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Zechariah and Elisabeth

Examples in Child Rearing

Rearing children has always been a challenging enterprise. We often decry the difficulty of the corrupting influences of modern life. We might argue that our day is unique in its cultural degeneration. If that were true, we might feel more absolved of the responsibility of rearing godly children. However, recall that Scripture indicates that the last days would be like the days of Noah. Need we be reminded that Noah lost one of his children? The truth is that each child is born with a fallen nature that automatically responds to the wrong influence in any era. The Bible is replete with examples of good people who lost their children to the world. Satan is determined to reach every child, so parents must be equally determined that he will not win the battle for the heart and soul of the child. We need more than just good children; we need godly children. That requires godly parents who are intentional in parenting. There are biblical parenting models who demonstrate proper principles, and one such model is found in the parents of John the Baptist.

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.” (Luke 1:5–7)

PREPARATION FOR PARENTING

It really ought not to be thought unusual that God used this couple to bring forth so important an instrument as John the Baptist. Look at the characteristics defined in verse 6.

United in perspective—“they were both.” Far too frequently parents are not on the same page. The reason is self-evident: in the process of courtship, they were too infatuated with their mutual attraction to bother themselves with questions about their mutual convictions. Many of the issues that mutual convictions must govern do not really surface until children come into the picture. It is a rude awakening to many parents when they discover that

they do not have the same goals for their children, that they do not agree on issues of discipline, and that their motives for having children differ. The time to resolve those questions is long before children are born. Those issues ought to be forthrightly discussed and agreed upon prior to marriage. It is significant that long before the birth of John, Zechariah and Elisabeth had the same view of life and therefore the same lifestyle. Life principles must be “caught” as well as “taught.”

Genuine in position—“righteous before God.” Righteousness has to do with right conduct as the result of right character. While some parents appear to be righteous before men, flaws in their character before God cannot be hidden in the home. Children are highly sensitive to disingenuity, and hypocrisy emboldens the already functioning fallen nature of our offspring. When parents recognize that the burden of their responsibility is primarily to be satisfied before God, they will become much more concerned about the reality of their spiritual character. This does not ensure carbon-copy children. Noah was righteous before the Lord, but Ham chose a different

THE POINT IS THAT ZECHARIAH AND ELISABETH CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE IN THE HOME THAT WAS FERTILE SOIL FOR NURTURING THE SOUL OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

path. Additionally, some children so thoroughly love Christ that they choose to follow Him instead of bad parental examples. The point is that Zechariah and Elisabeth created an atmosphere in the home that was fertile soil for nurturing the soul of John the Baptist.

Growth in progress—“walking.” It is interesting to note how often the Bible compares the believer’s life with a process of walking. As surely as babies learn to take their first ungainly steps and progress eventually to sufficient equilibrium to move about unaided, so do genuine believers. Christian growth is a process that takes time and attention. There is always hope for the home where parents are growing in grace, but there is little hope for the home where Christian growth is stunted and atrophied. The best possible preparation for parenting involves serious efforts to obey the clear commands of Scripture to grow.

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” (2 Pet. 3:18)

Grounded in principle—“in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.”

The proper manual for child training is not the most recent self-help child psychology bestseller. It is the Bible! Thorough knowledge of God’s Word is imperative for effective Christian living, much less effective parenting. Parents who are ignorant of God’s truth lack the raw material needed to lead their children to right character and conduct. Proper parenting requires serious Bible study.

Consistent in practice—“blameless.” Children generally emulate the godly example of their parents or stumble over the hypocrisy of their parents. The stumbling blocks to spiritual maturity are many for the child growing up in an inconsistent Christian home. Years before John was born, his parents practiced their faith personally, persistently, and practically.

It should also be noted that the birth of John was the direct result of burdened prayer.

“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.” (Luke 1:13)

God’s purpose for this newborn child was clearly given by prophecy, a purpose which his father both understood and faithfully helped develop in his son, as Luke succinctly records.

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.” (Luke 1:76–80)

PROSPECTS OF PARENTING

The faithfulness of Zacharias and Elisabeth resulted in the development of a significant servant of God. Verse 80 calls attention to three important areas of development for every child.

Physical development—“the child grew.” While growth in children is as natural as life itself, parents are responsible for the physical wellbeing of their children. In the age of video gaming and social media, it is important that parents take the physical development of their children seriously. After all, the body is the vehicle of service for God. Surely that vehicle ought to be as healthy and prepared as possible.

Moral development—“waxed strong in spirit.” Godly parents are concerned about the intellectual development of their children. Education is important. Yet it is tragic to educate the mind without thought for the development of the spirit. Character development

must be primary in the growing years of childhood. This responsibility cannot be delegated to the school or the church. While a good Christian school or home school and a Christ-honoring church enhance the character development of children, the burden for developing a strong spirit lies with the parents.

Spiritual development—“was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.” It is interesting that John was isolated from the evil that is readily seen and felt in urban settings. It is pure foolishness to think that exposure to wickedness is the proper way to prepare children to face wickedness. Too many voices dismiss godly insulation in the home as creating “hothouse” children. Tender plants need to be protected. Parents must be consumed with a burden for the spirituality of their offspring. Unfortunately, spirituality cannot be guaranteed. It is important to understand that Proverbs 22:6 (“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”) is a principle, not a promise. For it to have the force of a promise, parents would need to be perfect in the training of their children. Though that is not a reality in this life, parents can be spiritually maturing, with the attendant hope of children who will also become spiritually mature adults. Imagine the difference that might have accrued in the lives of the children of Jacob if he had already grown spiritually to become Israel.

The issue is a matter of intentionality. Genuine burden will result in better parental choices. Efforts will be made to make the spiritual education of the children equal in value to their intellectual education.

We are all deeply dependent upon the grace of God accessed by fervent prayer. The final product may not be apparent for years. Zechariah and Elisabeth were both “well stricken in years” (Luke 1:7) before John was even conceived. Scripture does not record whether they lived to see his meteoric ministry and martyrdom. Many parents do not see the “rest of the story.” Still, they plow in hope and sow the seed of faith and wait upon the Lord for the harvest.

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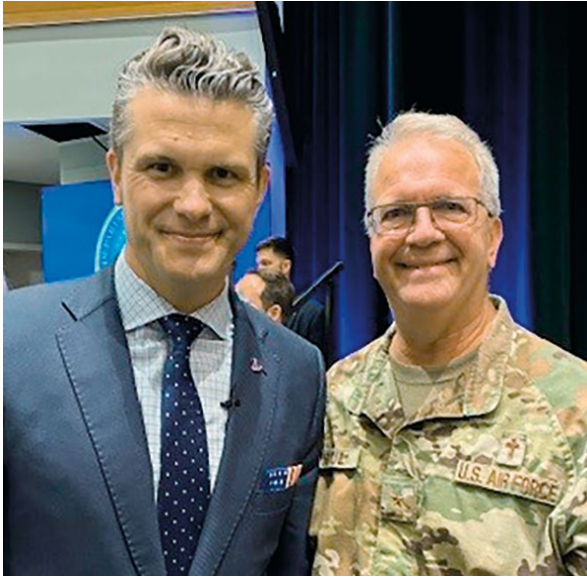
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News From All Over



Michael D. Sproul, Ch, Brigadier General, USAF (Retired) and pastor of Littleton Baptist Church in Littleton, Colorado, had the opportunity in July to attend Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's monthly prayer service in the Pentagon. As a General Officer, Mike sat in the front row and the Secretary of Defense sat in the first row across the aisle along with his wife and seven children. Ed Graham, the grandson of Billy Graham and a retired Lt Col, Army Ranger, shared a devotional after the Secretary of Defense opened in prayer.

After the service, Mike spoke to Secretary Hegseth. When Mike told him who he was, Secretary Hegseth immediately wanted to know more about the opportunities chaplains have to serve and any suggestions Mike might have for them to do so more effectively. Secretary Hegseth stated that he loves the chaplains and wants them to be used as best as possible.



FROM
the CALL
TO THE FIELD

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INSPIRATION FOR THE PASTOR'S STUDY

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)

How May We Assess Whether We Are Praying in the Spirit?

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18a).

The previous First Partaker column introduced the subject of praying *in the Spirit*. This matter is so vital that it can be scripturally argued that it is the only kind of praying that is acceptable to God, just as we would argue also that no prayer is acceptable to Him that isn't offered in Jesus' name.

I explained that in considering this subject, I wanted to accomplish four objectives. In summary, the first was to establish both exegetically and contextually that the emphatic point of Ephesians 6:18 is, unquestionably, *how* we are to pray (*in the Spirit*). It isn't *what* we are to pray (*prayer and supplication*) or *when* we are to do it (*always*; literally, *at all times*). Rather, the emphasis is decidedly on this matter of the character of our praying: *how* we are to pray.

That being established, I felt that a second necessary objective was to preclude a possible hasty conclusion. My title proposed that we may pray in the Spirit *consciously*. That is, it is possible for us to be fully aware of whether we are praying according to the verse's emphatic point. We can seek to do it and can know when we are. But I felt that it was necessary to explain that just because we may not be checking ourselves *intentionally* and *consciously* in this regard, we should not jump to the conclusion that, therefore, we (and nearly all other Christians) are hardly ever praying in this way. Actually, we should assume on sound scriptural grounds that

much of our praying may be of this character, whether we are conscious of it or not.

Nevertheless, Ephesians 6:18 confronts us with a command to be certain that this actually is the case, to attend to it. We even might say, to assess it. Are we, in fact, always praying *in the Spirit*? Whatever the category of our prayer (praise, blessing, adoration, confession, intercession, supplication, petition, etc.) is it in every case, and at any time, *in the Spirit*? By what standards can we gauge this? How are we to ensure that it is?

THE PRIMARY FACTOR THAT WOULD PREVENT OUR PRAYING *IN THE SPIRIT*

I want now to introduce a third objective: to identify the primary factor that should alert us to when we are failing to pray in this way. When can we be certain of the times that our praying *lacks* this vital character? To put the answer concisely, it is when we are in some way offending the Holy Spirit.

There are at least six New Testament descriptions of offenses against Him. In canonical order, they are (1) blaspheming Him (Matt. 12:31), (2) lying to Him (Acts 5:3), (3) putting Him to the test (Acts 5:9), (4) resisting Him (Acts 7:51), (5) grieving Him (Eph. 4:30), and (6) quenching Him (1 Thess. 5:19). Since the first (blaspheming Him) is unforgiveable, it could be committed only by a non-Christian. But all the remaining five are possible for true believers.

I don't know how any single consideration could be more critical for us to assess than this one. Do we know of any way that our praying may be being *hindered*—not just made more difficult, but actually *prevented* (1 Pet. 3:7)—by our wronging the Holy Spirit?

Princeton Seminary's first professor, Archibald Alexander, was a spiritual mentor with broad

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experience. He had been an itinerant evangelist, a pastor, and a respected theologian before he inaugurated Princeton's first seminary class in 1806. Over twenty years later (1828) he authored a work, still being published, titled *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. The book is noteworthy for its emphasis upon the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in all phases of spiritual life. And its author's life bore eminent testimony to his own mature *walk in the Spirit*. His colleague, Samuel Miller, testified while Alexander was still living, *I solemnly believe that Dr. Alexander is the greatest man who walks the earth*. I don't know that I've ever heard or read such a testimony given to any man, especially from someone so highly esteemed himself, and who worked alongside him nearly every day for forty years.

So here, surely, is the first and foremost requisite to praying in the Spirit: that we ourselves be in character as He is, and that we be temples that are holy, as He is holy. Only then can we function both as sanctuaries of the Holy Spirit and as a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5). These spiritual sacrifices include our prayers, offered continually (Heb. 13:15). These are now incense in God's temple in heaven (Rev. 5:8), typified by the incense offered perpetually in the Old Testament temple (Exod. 30:7–8).

I've used that entire paragraph highlighting Alexander in order to get maximum respectful consideration for one quotation from his *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. It's taken from the chapter on growing in grace. He gives nine practical directions. Here is his fourth (bold emphasis is mine).

Pray constantly and fervently for the influences of the Holy Spirit. No blessing is so particularly and emphatically promised in answer to prayer as this; and if you would receive this divine gift, to be in you as a well of water springing up to everlasting life, you must not only pray, but you must watch against everything in your heart or life which has a tendency to grieve the Spirit of God. Of what account is it to pray, if you indulge evil thoughts and imaginations almost without control? or [sic] if you give way to the evil passions of anger, pride and avarice, or bridle

not your tongue from evil speaking? Learn to be conscientious; that is, obey the dictates of your conscience uniformly. Many are conscientious in some things and not in others; they listen to the monitor within when it directs to important duties; but in smaller matters they often disregard the voice of conscience, and follow present inclination. Such cannot grow in grace.

Alexander's searching questions are of the kind that we ought to put to ourselves consciously before attempting to pray, either privately or in a group. *Of what use is it to pray, if . . . ?* When we are only too conscious that our actions, words, thoughts, and very dispositions are fleshly and the very opposite of the fruit of the Spirit, we may be sure that we simply cannot pray *in the Spirit*.

WHAT IT IS TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT

The last objective for considering this subject is to provide the positive elements indicating that we are, in fact, praying in this way.

First, to pray *in the Spirit* would have to begin with praying *as He is*. That is, it begins with being a "prayer" of the same character as the Spirit Himself. What is His character? Three times in the Old Testament (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10–11) and ninety times in the New, He is described as *Holy*. All three members of the Godhead are, of course, equally and eternally holy. But the Spirit is apparently singled out to be highlighted in this character because it is He, of the Three-in-One, whose office it is to apply to us the sanctifying work of the Son (Eph. 5:26). He is called the *Spirit of holiness* (literal text of Rom. 1:4), an expression that almost certainly reflects the truth that it is He who is the member of the Godhead effectually bringing about *our* holiness (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2).

When we think of this as it relates to our praying, we should give full weight to the fact that our bodies are *the temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 6:19). Having done so, we should then reflect upon our Lord's explanation for why He cleansed the temple. *My house*, He said, *shall be called a house of prayer* (Matt. 21:13). Both then and now, God's "temple" is for prayer. A defiled temple contradicts its divine purpose. If this was true of that inanimate physical structure of our Lord's day, how much more of our living, physical bodies now?

So here, surely, is the first and foremost requisite to praying *in the Spirit*: that we ourselves be in character as He is, and that we be temples that are holy, as He is holy. Only then can we function both as sanctuaries of the Holy Spirit and as a *holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 2:5). These *spiritual sacrifices* include our prayers, offered *continually* (Heb. 13:15). These are now incense in God's temple in heaven (Rev. 5:8), typified by the incense offered *perpetually* in the Old Testament temple (Exod. 30:7–8).

A **second** positive element indicating that we are praying in the Spirit is that we are praying *as He does*. We are praying in the Spirit when we are praying *as He is*, and *as He does*.

Assessing whether we are praying *as He is* focuses upon our *character* when we pray. Focusing upon praying *as He does* assesses the *content* of our praying. Is it the same as the Spirit's? What does the Spirit pray? Whatever it is, the more closely we can approximate it, the more we can be certain that we are praying *in the Spirit*.

The principal text informing us of what the Spirit prays is Romans 8:27.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will* of God.

Here we're told what is in the Spirit's *mind* when He intercedes for us: "*the will of God*." *The will of* is italicized because it is the translators' interpretation of the relationship between the words, *according to and God (kata theon)*. What is meant by this phrase, *according to God*? Within the verse's own context, it is parallel to *mind of the Spirit*. The Spirit's mind is (always and exactly) *according to God*. This is why every current English translation that I've checked (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NEB, ESV, Legacy Standard Bible) takes *according to God* to refer to what God's *will* is.

There are times, the previous verse acknowledges, when we ourselves simply do not know what to pray *as we ought*. Those words, *as we ought*, alert us to the fact that if we only knew it, we would discover that from the standpoint of the divine will there is always some *necessary* (indicated by the word *ought*) content to be prayed. However, we sometimes don't know it. But the Spirit does. And He always prays it.

This is instructive when it comes to assessing whether we are praying in the Spirit. Are we praying *as He always does*? Is our content what His always is? Is it God's will? This is why the catechisms define prayer as *an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will*. Properly speaking, prayer isn't venting. It isn't coaxing. It isn't twisting God's mind to ours. It is saying to Him, just as the Holy Spirit does, *Thy will be done*.

This is where our Bible becomes our infallible guide. Every word of its original text, along with every grammatical relationship between those words, was breathed out. By whom? By the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:21). He breathed out what God the Father and God the Son gave to Him (John 16:13). It is, in every syllable, the will of God. Every word that the Spirit gave to us on behalf of the Father and the Son is God's inerrant will, and every word that He prays to the Father on our behalf is God's inerrant will. This means that knowing our Bibles well enables us to pray well—or to put it according to what we're considering, to pray *in the Spirit*.

The greatest practical aid to this ever devised is Matthew Henry's *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions*. Just four years before he died, Henry wove together for praying over 2300 Scripture quotations arranged under nine major headings (*Adoration, Confession, Petition*, etc.), and subdivided further into scores of narrower topics.

For example, take the major heading of *Intercession*. I'll omit Henry's first seven sub-categories and go to one especially close to all our hearts: *For all the ministers of God's holy word*. Space allows for my including only about half of the Scripture expressions Henry offers for intercessory prayer for us.

Teach thy ministers how they ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). *That they may not preach themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord* (2 Cor. 4:5) *and may study to shew themselves approved to God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (2 Tim. 2:15).

Make them mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24), *that from thence they may be thoroughly furnished for every good work* (2 Tim. 3:17); *in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, and sound speech which cannot be condemned* (Tit. 2:7–8).

Enable them to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13), *to meditate upon these things, to give themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word, to give themselves wholly to them, and to continue in them that they may both save themselves and those that hear them* (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 4:15–16).

Let utterance be given to them, that they may open their mouths boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, that thereof they may speak as they ought to speak (Eph. 6:19–20), *as able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit* (2 Cor. 3:6), *and let them obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful* (1 Cor. 7:25).

The point of this example isn't to argue that our praying must always be the very language of Scripture. It's to call attention to a tool, devised by an unusually spiritually-minded minister, that can be used for shaping the content of our prayers by the mind of the Spirit. In this way, we may pray in the Spirit, *consciously*.

Of course, the single largest body of prayers in Scripture is the book of Psalms. The more familiar that we are with it, noting especially the circumstances and dispositions of those praying, the more we will be enabled to pray just as the Spirit of God does.

In urging this practice, the 17th-century English minister William Gurnall explained that prayer was to *show God his own hand*. He continued, *Prayer is nothing but the promise reversed, or God's word formed into an*

argument, and retorted by faith upon God again (*The Christian in Complete Armour*, 2:88).

The **third** positive indicator that we are praying *in the Spirit* is that we are praying *when He prompts*. This Spiritual phenomenon cannot be explained entirely, just as Spiritual birth cannot (John 3:8). But that it does truly take place is revealed in Scripture. One of the most notable texts is Zechariah 12:10.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.

Undoubtedly, we receive from the Holy Spirit these same gracious promptings to pray again and again and again throughout the course of our living in Christ and for Christ to the glory of God.

Almost certainly, the word *spirit* refers not to our human spirit but to the Holy Spirit. He is the *Spirit of grace and supplications*. This means that it is He who prompts, or moves someone to pray this kind of prayer, *supplication*. Because this prompting is a supernatural work of grace, He is also described as *the Spirit of grace*. Remarkably, *supplications* and *grace* share a common root, leading the commentator H. C. Leupold to suggest that the phrase could be understood as the *Spirit of grace and pleadings for grace*.

I need to clarify that the word *prompt* doesn't connote the entire extent of what Zechariah 12:10 is foretelling of the Spirit's ministry upon Israel in the future. It will be much more than a "nudge" that the remnant may or may not respond to. It will be, in the strongest sense of the word, *effectual*—unfailingly bringing to pass the divinely desired effects. I intend to include this stronger influence later on while discussing a fourth positive indicator that we are praying *in the Spirit*. But the phenomenon that I'm concerned to bring to our attention at this point is that there is such a thing as our feeling, subjectively, an impulse or inclination to pray that sometimes is the result of the Holy Spirit's pressing it upon us directly (i.e., apart from any external stimulus).

John Owen differentiates these two degrees of Spiritual influence by the words *disposeth* and *enableth*.

He both disposeth the hearts of men to pray and enableth them so to do. This ability, indeed, he communicates in great variety, as to the degrees of it, and [as to its] usefulness unto others in its exercise, but he doth it unto everyone so far as is necessary unto his own spiritual concerns, or the discharge of his duty towards God and all others. (A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer)

What John Owen explains is what all of us who truly know Christ have ourselves experienced from the beginning. We were drawn to Christ supernaturally (John 6:44), and both inclined and enabled to call upon Him for salvation. We're taught that no one can do this apart from the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3).

After experiencing this phenomenon at the time of our conversion, we again experienced this prompting of the Spirit to pray when He cried out within us, *Abba, Father* (Gal. 4:6). By doing this, He inclined us to address God in this same way ourselves: *Ye have received the Spirit of adoption* [sonship], *whereby we cry, Abba, Father* (Rom. 8:15). One of the evidences that Paul cites as confirming our sonship is that we are *led by the Spirit of God* to call out to God in this way (Rom. 8:14).

Undoubtedly, we receive from the Holy Spirit these same gracious promptings to pray again and again and again throughout the course of our living in Christ and for Christ to the glory of God. They are not, of course, revelatory or in any way undermining of the sufficiency of Scripture in our lives. They are, instead, a foremost, subjective, experiential aspect of what Scripture calls *the communion of the Holy Ghost* (2 Cor. 13:14). To quote Owen again,

It is he alone who worketh us unto that frame wherein we pray continually, as it is required of us; our hearts being kept ready and prepared for this duty on all occasions and opportunities, being in the meantime acted and steered under the contact and influence of those graces which are to be exercised therein . . . faith, love, delight, fear, reverence, self-abasement, and the like, unto certain especial ends.

Robert Traill wrote that this is a great mystery and yet a genuine, felt reality.

The operation of the Spirit in believers, the communion of the Holy Ghost, is a great mystery. He works more on them than they feel or know. And they feel more than they can express in words. (Works, 2:44)

To pray *in the Spirit*, then, includes being responsive to Him when He *worketh us unto that frame wherein we pray* (Owen). We ought never ignore this inclination to pray. Nor debate it. Nor quench it. We ought yield to it gladly, being assured that to do so is to *walk in the Spirit* by *praying in the Spirit*.

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BRING...THE BOOKS

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

More Books for a Deserted Island

If you were marooned on a remote island with only three books on it (a Bible, a hymn book, and Pilgrim's Progress), what other five books would you want to have with you?

Tools. I have a host of them in my garage. Sometimes I acquire a new tool for a unique project and end up using it just one time. On the other hand, some tools I use so frequently that I have elected to put them in a small toolbox and take them with me wherever I go in my pickup truck. I suppose that, if I had room for only five of my tools, I would carefully choose a pair of pliers, a screwdriver, a hammer, a knife, and an adjustable wrench. Those would most likely be the five I could get by with should I find myself stranded somewhere.

As I pondered which five books I would want with me were I marooned on a remote island, I decided to choose from among those that I have strategically placed on my bookshelves to be within my long arms' reach for immediate and frequent access. All five of these tools are reference books that enable me to better "search the scriptures" through the study of individual words and enhance my Scripture meditation and ability to compare Scripture with Scripture.

The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible is, no doubt, most commonly used for simply locating verses in the Bible by recalling a particular word, or words, known to be used in a verse. However, it not only "lists every occurrence of every word in the Bible" ("Instructions to the Reader," p. vi) but it also, with each word, provides a reference number to the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries at the back of the concordance. In many instances a single English word represents more than one word in the original Hebrew or Greek. It is in these instances that a comparison of the different words used in the original languages, translated into one English word, frequently yields instruction that is worthy of further meditation.

The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance (5th edition) is coded with the numerical system used in my *Strong's Concordance*. Thus, this is the tool I pull from the shelf to follow the number listed in *Strong's*, find every verse in which that Hebrew word is used, and then, by seeing how it is used, better understand why a biblical writer chose that word. The fact that the verses are cited in English allows for quick and easy comparisons. It is in the preface to this concordance that I found a comment, written by the revising editor, Jay P. Green, that reflects my own interest in the study of individual words. In a section titled "The Christian's Responsibility to Study God's Word" he writes:

Anyone who has read the Bible through and through many times knows that each reading reveals further meanings

to the words God had given us. The unsearchable riches of God are buried in the depths of His words. A serious student of the Bible soon discovers that there is great authority in the words of God on the face of them, but once the depths of these words are plumbed, they take on even more authority.

My *Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (5th edition) is the tool I would reach for if the word I am seeking or studying is found in the New Testament. Since this concordance lists every occurrence of every Greek word in the New Testament, I am able to compare the contexts of different Greek synonyms which are translated by the same word in English. Through this process I have received much instruction and have frequently been rewarded with the discovery, on my own, of some real Greek gems.

My companion tool to this concordance is *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. My copy (Zondervan, 1998) is authored by a father-son team, Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III. I have found it extremely helpful in my New Testament exegetical work and, as an "up-grade" to an earlier edition, it includes "more grammatical explanations . . . especially in the use of the tenses, participles, and infinitives; [and] more comments and references to historical works" (p. vii). Although I use it mostly as a reference tool to verify my verb conjugations and as a non-exhaustive lexicon, I have also often found the comments (from approximately 700 works cited in the bibliography) to be interesting, very helpful, and frequently thought-provoking.

My fifth choice is a wonderful tool that assists in the practice of comparing Scripture with Scripture, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, by Jerome H. Smith. This invaluable tool lists almost every verse in the Bible, providing cross-references to any "related thought, theme, doctrine, subject, concept, or literary motif, even when expressed in entirely different words" (p. xii).

I once worked at a college information desk, and many times when I was away from that desk, people would stop me on campus and ask me questions I could not answer. When they would quizzically respond with, "I thought you knew everything," I would have to remind them that, away from the information desk's reference materials, I was without my tools. The five books I have listed above are five tools that, in like manner, would enable me to find endless treasures of encouragement in my Bible while marooned on a remote island!

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A Sense of Eternity in Our Hearts

The book of Ecclesiastes is a fascinating book to consider because of its observational wisdom and its descriptions of the conundrums of living life under the sun. Written as a piece of wisdom literature, Solomon seeks to argue the point that there is meaning to life when it is lived in fear and obedience to God (12:13). One of its conundrums is found in chapter 3.

After the poem about the times and seasons of life (3:1–8), Solomon asks in verse 9, “What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?” (NKJV). In other words, what’s the point of working so hard if everything will happen at its appointed time? One of the answers is in verse 11, which the KJV renders, “He hath set the world in their heart.” However, “the world” doesn’t quite capture the sense of the Hebrew word that is used here. In the NKJV we read that God “has put eternity in their hearts.” This phrase means much more than the oft-spoken phrase that “everyone has a God-sized hole in their heart.” It speaks to the notion that individuals have a sense of something beyond the sensory, physical, and temporal world.

There is a tension we all experience between living within time and knowing something of eternity beyond it. How does what happens in time and on earth (vv. 2–8) make sense with the eternal sense in our hearts? Perhaps we can illustrate this with a jigsaw puzzle.

Imagine all the things of life Solomon presents to us (vv. 2–8) are pieces of the puzzle. We know all the pieces are supposed to fit together to make a nice picture, but from our vantage point they just seem like a jumbled mess. The problem isn’t that the pieces don’t fit, but that we don’t yet know how they fit, though we understand that they do. Only God has the lid with the picture on it. He knows how it all works together to make a beautiful tapestry of life. Even with a sense of eternity within us, however, “no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (3:11, NKJV).

This is an interesting thought. There is a sense in which we have an understanding that there is something beyond what we know and experience, but even with that knowledge we still cannot figure out all the works of God, how He orchestrates things, what He means by them, or how He will make them all beautiful in their time.

So what are we left to do? Many people, because of their insatiable lust to understand, will find themselves all stirred up in their soul with worry and fear. However, that will not help. Trusting God is the key here.

Not everything makes sense to us in this life, but we must rest ourselves in the God who knows how it all works together for His grander and greater purposes. Real trust in someone comes when you don’t understand. Though we cannot see how God works it all to be beautiful in its time, are we willing to trust that He will do so in His wise and sovereign plan?

Trusting God is not dependent upon our understanding of what God is doing. It is not dependent upon things working out the way we want them to. It is, though, trusting in His character. We must trust God, not our ideas or wisdom. Because God exists above and outside of time, and is able to make all things beautiful in time, we can rest in Him for the few short years of life under the sun, for God understands everything with perfect wisdom.

We live for roughly seventy to eighty years on this earth and experience a lot. God has ordained many things to take place in our lives for a reason, including the pleasant, the painful, and the puzzling. Though all those puzzle pieces of our lives may not make much sense to us right now, we know there is a beautiful picture that God is perfectly painting, fitting everything together in exactly the way He desires it. We must therefore trust in the God of eternity, who sees the end from the beginning. Right now we can only wonder and imagine what the lid to the puzzle of our life looks like, but it will all make sense when we are face to face with Him.

So, “what profit has the worker from that in which he labors?” The profit comes in knowing that what we do and have “is the gift of God” (3:13, NKJV). Therefore, though we have “eternity in [our] heart” we still cannot see how everything God allows into our lives will fit together to be “beautiful in its time” (v. 11). We must trust the God of the universe, knowing that “whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him” (v. 14).

Live out your time on this earth with eternity in your view, trusting in God, the Creator of time who knows the end from the beginning. With a sense of eternity in our hearts, we can trust our eternal God.

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

Promises God Gives Us to Face Our Trials

“Yet man is born unto trouble,
as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7)

Many times, we cause our own problems or let the cares of the world choke us. Yet God allows trials to come our way or appoints them for us to grow as He performs a work in us until the day of Christ. In His graciousness God gives promises to help us face our trials.

GOD GIVES US THE COURAGE TO FACE OUR TRIALS (ISA. 41:10)

This courage comes to us by God’s commands as we obey His commands, which in return gives us comfort in what lies ahead of us. In their captivity, the children of Israel were to obey the command to “fear not” because God was with them and to “be not dismayed” because He is their God (cf. Deut. 31:6, 8). This courage comes to us in a similar way by God’s commitment to believers as we observe that commitment through God’s presence, providence, promises, and power.

God will empower his people by strengthening, helping, and upholding them (Isa. 41:10). This is God’s firm promise to his fearful people based on his powerful and victorious right hand that brings salvation in times of war. Because of God’s power and love, people in the past and today can face the trials of life with courage, for God’s promise to be with his people has not changed (Matt. 28:18–20). All power still rests in his hands.¹

When Luther was summoned to attend the Diet of Worms, his friends, mistrusting the promise of safety granted to him by Emperor Charles V, attempted to persuade him not to go. Luther replied, “I am determined to enter the city in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, though as many devils should oppose me as there are tiles upon all the houses at Worms.” He was accompanied from Wittenberg by some clergy and one hundred horsemen, but he took only eight horsemen into Worms. When he stepped out of the carriage, he said in the presence of a great multitude of people, “God shall be on my side!”² Luther looked at his present trial through the eyes of God, knowing the courage and confidence that God had promised him. God has promised to give us courage as we face our life trials.

GOD GIVES US THE WISDOM TO UNDERSTAND OUR TRIALS (JAMES 1:5)

The admonition of this promise is again recognized in a command to ask for wisdom. In practical terms, wisdom is “the ability to apply the truth of God’s Word to everyday situations according to the will of God.” Edmond Hiebert says that wisdom “is the moral discernment that enables the believer to meet life and its

trials with decisions and actions consistent with God’s will.”³ God’s promise for us is to give us wisdom generously, knowing that no prayer for wisdom is an insult to Him. Warren Wiersbe tells of a lady who really knew the meaning of James 1:5. “An associate of mine, a gifted secretary, was going through great trials. She had suffered a stroke, her husband had gone blind, and then he had to be taken to the hospital where (we were sure) he would die. I saw her in church one Sunday and assured her that I was praying for her. ‘What are you asking God to do?’ she asked, and her question startled me. ‘I’m asking God to help you and strengthen you,’ I replied. ‘I appreciate that,’ she said, ‘but pray about one more thing. Pray that I’ll have the wisdom not to waste all of this!’”⁴

John MacArthur gives us further insight into this truth of understanding these trials we face: “Without hesitation, reluctance, or reservation, His divine wisdom will be given to us in generous abundance. He will say to us, in effect, what He said to His people Israel through the psalmist, ‘I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it’” (Ps. 81:10).⁵

Remember, this wisdom is manifested in God’s word as we study it for the sake of our righteousness and then connect it to our prayer for illumination. God will give it to us in His timing as He matures us according to His will.

GOD GIVES US THE STRENGTH TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE (PHIL. 4:13)

One summer morning as Ray Blankenship was preparing his breakfast, he gazed out the window and saw a small girl being swept along in the rain-flooded drainage ditch beside his home in Andover, Ohio. Blankenship knew that farther downstream, the ditch disappeared with a roar underneath a road and then emptied into the main culvert. Ray dashed out the door and raced along the ditch, trying to get ahead of the floundering child. Then he hurled himself into the deep, churning water. Blankenship surfaced and was able to grab the child’s arm. They tumbled end over end. Within about three feet of the yawning culvert, Ray’s free hand felt something—possibly a rock—protruding from one bank. He clung desperately, but the tremendous force of the water tried to tear him and the child away. “*If I can just hang on until help comes,*” he thought. He did better than that. By the time fire department rescuers arrived, Blankenship had pulled the girl to safety. Both were treated for shock. On April 12, 1989, Ray Blankenship was awarded the Coast Guard’s Silver Lifesaving Medal. The award was fitting, for this selfless person was at even greater risk to himself than most people knew. *Ray Blankenship couldn’t swim.* (Paul Harvey; LA Times Syndicate; SermonIllustrations.com)

Every Christian ought to read *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* because it illustrates this principle of inner power in the life of a great missionary to China. For many years, Hudson Taylor worked hard and felt that he was trusting Christ to meet his needs, but somehow, he had no joy or liberty in his ministry. Then a letter from a friend opened his eyes to the adequacy of Christ. "It is not by trusting my own faithfulness, but by looking away to the Faithful One!" he said. This was a turning point in his life. Moment by moment, he drew on the power of Christ for every responsibility of the day, and Christ's power carried him through.⁶

Regarding Philippians 4:13, Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote, "I can therefore summarize the teaching like this. The secret of power is to discover and to learn from the New Testament what is possible for us in Christ. What I have to do is to go to Christ. I must spend my time with Him. I must meditate upon Him, I must get to know Him. That was Paul's ambition—that I might know Him.' I must maintain my contact and communion with Christ and I must concentrate on knowing Him. What else? I must do exactly what He tells me. I must avoid things that would hamper. If in the midst of persecution we want to feel as Paul felt, we must live as Paul lived. I must do what He tells me, both to do and not to do. I must read the Bible, I must exercise, I must practice the Christian life, I must live the Christian life in all its fullness."⁷ What a wonderful promise to know that God gives us the strength to do what must be done.

GOD GIVES US THE FAITH TO TRUST GOD TO DO WHAT WE CANNOT DO (PS. 37:4-5)

There is no situation I can get into that God cannot get me out of. James Brown of Wildsville, Louisiana, writes, "Some years ago when I was learning to fly, my instructor told me to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. I was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. After a brief time the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out of control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help me at all. After a few seconds, which seemed like eternity, my mind began to function again. I quickly corrected the situation.

Immediately I turned to the instructor and began to vent my fearful frustrations on him. He very calmly said to me, 'There is no position you can get this airplane into that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again.' At that moment God seemed to be saying to me, 'Remember this. As you serve Me, there is no situation you can get yourself into that I cannot get you out of. If you trust me, you will be all right.'" (*Discoveries* [Fall, 1991], vol. 2, no. 4)

"The command to 'commit' our ways to God is not a redundancy. . . . The word actually means 'to roll one's way onto God,' the figure being, as H. C. Leupold says, to 'dislodge the burden from your shoulders and lay it on God.' This is what the apostle Peter was thinking about in 1 Peter 5:7—in fact, he was probably referring to Psalm 37:5 explicitly—when he wrote, 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.' He meant that we do not need to worry about things because God cares for us, is equal to all circumstances, and will manage anything that can possibly come into our lives."⁸

As we delight in the Lord, His ways will be our heart while we dislodge our burdens from our shoulders, knowing that God will do what we cannot do. What wonderful promises that God graciously gives us to face our trials.

Mark Love pastors Colchester Bible Baptist Church in Colchester, Connecticut.

¹ Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66* (B&H, 2009), 135.

² *AMG Bible Illustrations* (AMG, 2000).

³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *James* (BMH, 1997), 69.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Victor, 1996), 2:340.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *James* (Moody, 1998), 37.

⁶ Wiersbe, 2:98.

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Eerdmans, 1965), 298–99.

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41* (Baker, 2005), 317.

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Coordinator: Dan Unruh

March 9-11, 2026

South Regional Fellowship

The Wilds of North Carolina
1000 Wilds Ridge Road
Brevard, NC 28712
Coordinator: Tony Facenda

March 16-17, 2026

Northwest Regional Fellowship

Grace Baptist Church
114 4th Ave. NW
Puyallup, WA 98371
Host pastor: Andy Oliver
Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

March 23-24, 2026

California Regional Fellowship

Calvary Baptist Church
1768 N. Newcomb Street
Porterville, CA 93257
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

May 18-19, 2026

**Rocky Mountain (Wyoming)
Regional Fellowship**

Location: TBA
Coordinator: Dan Unruh

September 15, 2026

**New York City Regional
Fellowship**

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

October 5-7, 2026

FBFI Annual Fellowship

Faith Baptist Church
500 W. Lee Road
Taylors, SC 29687
Coordinator: Caleb Phelps



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A Biblical Message for Aging Parents

By Kevin Schaal | August 10, 2025

As parents age, the dynamics of family life shift in profound ways. One of the most important—and often overlooked—conversations aging parents must have is about . . .

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/08/10/a-biblical-message-for-aging-parents/>

Also note the follow-up, **A Biblical Message for Children of Aging Parents** by Kevin Schaal, <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/08/17/a-biblical-message-for-children-of-aging-parents/>

A Biblical Understanding of Musical Elements

By Erik Hanson | July 8, 2025

What is musical sound? A standard definition of music is “intentionally organized sound” (Roger Scruton). It is “the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession . . . to produce a composition having unity and continuity” (Merriam-Webster).

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/07/08/a-biblical-understanding-of-musical-elements/>

Find links to the whole series at the end of the final post: **Biblical Understanding of Making Musical Choices**, <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/08/06/biblical-understanding-of-making-musical-choices/>

John MacArthur and the Fundamental Baptists

By Kevin Schaal | July 16, 2025

John MacArthur entered heaven on Monday at the age of 86. It’s difficult to know exactly what to say about him, as members of our . . .

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/07/16/john-macarthur-and-the-fundamental-baptists/>

Extraordinary Grace for Ordinary Problems

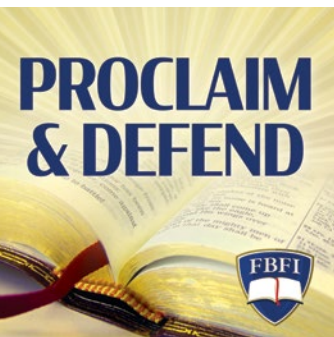
By Ben Hicks | July 10, 2025

I used to find the Psalms discouraging. Not because the Psalms themselves are depressing, in fact, quite the opposite! The Psalms are filled with accounts . . .

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/07/10/extraordinary-grace-for-ordinary-problems/>

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Regional Reports

CHESAPEAKE BAY FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Kent Ramler, Regional Coordinator

In conjunction with the Westminster Fellowship, the Chesapeake Bay Region of the FBFI met for a day of fellowship and instruction on Friday, August 8. Pastor Tim Leaman and Calvary Baptist Church (Westminster, Maryland) hosted the event and provided a wonderful breakfast and lunch free of charge to those attending. The theme of the fellowship meeting was "Ministry in the Digital Age." Missionary Matt Conrad spoke on the topic of "Technology in Missions and Education."

Pastor Joel Porcher followed with a discussion of "Technology in Outreach," and Pastor Tobin Lehman finished with a session on "Using AI for Pastoral Ministry."

Over twenty attended the fellowship meeting, some traveling a few hours to be

there, and ages ranged from teens to senior saints. There was a sweet time of prayer, great food, and encouraging fellowship. We anticipate another fellowship in early August of 2026.



NEW YORK CITY FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Matt Recker, Regional Coordinator

The New York City FBFI Regional Meeting on September 9 at Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, was a time of genuine fellowship and challenge.

Dr. Ben and Becca Sinclair were our guest speakers. Dr. Sinclair serves as the Executive Director of Baptist World Mission and previously served in Cameroon. Dr. Sinclair spoke with truth and passion upon the theme of partnership with missionaries, a theme that was new to our fellowship meetings. It was good to consider and reflect on the way we partner with our missionaries: Are we providing

enough financial support? Are we praying for them and regularly communicating with them? Do we ever visit them?

Furthermore, Dr. Sinclair showed us from Scripture that deputation is taught in Scripture from the word *propempō*. This word is used in verses such as Romans 15:24 and shows how the churches brought forth the Apostle Paul and provided the funds he needed for his ministry ahead. Dr. Sinclair writes in his book, *Missionary Partnership*, "Is this not exactly what independent Baptist missionaries do today?" (p. 50).

We also had a split session as Becca taught the ladies. Pastor Jim Bickel and the brethren of Bethel Baptist Fellowship were wonderful hosts as they provided a continental breakfast. Heritage Baptist Church of NYC, which co-hosts the

meeting, provided a catered Italian luncheon enjoyed by all. We distributed issues of *FrontLine* magazine to all who came and provided Dr. Sinclair's book to those in full-time ministry.

Join us for our next fellowship on September 15, 2026, at Bethel Baptist Fellowship, Brooklyn, New York.



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The World at Our Doorstep

Chaplaincy Ministry to Scouting America

My introduction to the Scouting community began when our son, Andrew, was entering first grade. A family from church recommended their Cub Scout pack to us, and we quickly learned why. It was fun! Scouting soon became our most vibrant connection to the local community outside the church family. Many of the events and field trips that we shared with other Scouting families were activities that we, as a family, had intended to experience someday. The pack's event calendar was the mechanism that translated "someday" into reality.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Recognizing that all this healthy activity was planned and delivered by volunteer parents, I soon joined the pack's leadership team, eventually serving two years as Cubmaster. It was simultaneously the hardest I'd ever worked and the most rewarded that I'd ever felt. And though it was great fun and taught practical life skills and afforded hands-on leadership development experiences, I found that the real value of Scouting lay elsewhere. Scouting creates community and builds relationships. Scouting became a place for our family to live, volunteer, and play, making friends in the process and finding opportunities to share the love of Christ.

When the Lord led our family to relocate to Maryland, Scouting became one of our first connection points with our new community. Over the years, I have teamed up with my pastor, Dr. Kent Ramler, to

offer sixteen Religious Emblems courses to the local Scouting community. This has been an opportunity to evangelize more than eighty Scouts and their families (and counting!).

A CALL TO MINISTRY

After Andrew went off to college and our family was no longer associated with a troop, I prayed for direction in my future Scouting engagements. Having been an active leader for twelve years, it would not have been unexpected to let my membership lapse and fade into Scouting retirement. But God continued to open doors, and year after year I found events to support and fellowship opportunities to share with other gospel-minded Scouters. The initial tugs toward chaplaincy ministry emerged through the opportunity to organize and conduct the Sunday morning chapel services at a succession of three semi-annual weekend camporees (campouts to which all the troops in our area are invited, typically organized around a theme).

Two years ago, a call to volunteer chaplaincy came into clearer focus through a series of invitations from within the Scouting community. First, the all-volunteer leadership of our local Scout camp (<https://gotocampcatocin.org/>) invited me to serve as Camp Chaplain for the week, delivering daily vespers services and camp-wide chapel services, leading times of group prayer, and being available to youth and adults who needed someone to talk to. Second, the head chaplain of the National

Jamboree Staff, a distinguished Baptist Scouter, invited me to join the chaplain corps for the next National Jamboree. The Jamboree invitation came with encouragement to seek licensing or ordination from my local church and endorsement from a chaplain-endorsing agency. Third, our Scouting District nominated and approved me to become their District Chaplain and Religious Emblems Coordinator.

In light of these opportunities and a growing burden to minister, I sought direction from my pastor. This began the process of applying for endorsement through FBFI and seeking a license to preach through our local church.

SCOUTING CHAPLAINCY

Chaplaincy is a ministry of bearing the presence and the message of Christ Jesus from within the membership ranks of a defined community outside the local church. Of the community-oriented volunteer organizations across the United States, Scouting America (formerly known as Boy Scouts of America) affords as faith-friendly an environment as any. Scouts pledge an oath at their weekly meetings that includes doing their duty to God, as well as claiming *Reverence* as one of the twelve points of the Scout Law. Scouting is nonsectarian in approach, referring Scouts to their families for specific spiritual direction. For the loosely churched or unchurched Scout, such commitments raise legitimate questions, such as "How do I do

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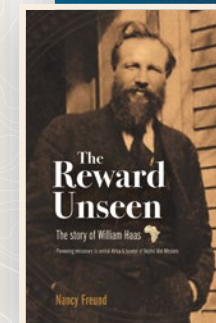
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Heart to Heart

Traci Mayes

Your Spouse Is Your One Another Too

It's always bothered me when stories end with "and they lived happily ever after" without showing what came after. I want to know what happened next.

In stark contrast to the fairytale world where all obstacles precede marriage, marriage in real life can often reveal problems and flaws as soon as the new couple gets back from their honeymoon. In my own life, celebrating our 35th wedding anniversary has caused me to reflect on my marriage and marriage in general. Looking back on why my husband and I got married and how we've stayed married has reminded me of a few valuable lessons we've learned along the way. Not coincidentally, many of the lessons flow from biblical principles, specifically the New Testament's "one another" passages. Implementing these principles allows us to develop a happy home of our own.

First, we need to make loving one another the foundation. Several passages repeat the command to love one another (John 13:34; 15:12; Rom. 13:8; 1 John 4:7). Loving one another doesn't apply only to our fellow believers but also and especially to our spouse. Without love, marriage seems too much like a business arrangement. Recognizing how the attributes we loved in the younger version of our spouse remained and grew helps our feelings of love to generate loving behaviors. Love fuels the daily routine.

As we love one another, we also follow Romans 12:10's command to "in honor prefer one another." John Piper explains that honoring another means "treating [others] with your deeds and words as worthy of your service. . . . Some honoring means treating people better than they deserve. . . [We should] prefer to honor rather than be honored."* Piper's definition helps us see how this command should be lived out in our homes. And when we seek to honor our spouse instead of demanding honor, we allow our spouse to

flourish. As husband and wife outdo each other in honoring each other, they generate a pleasant environment focused on love and service. Motivated by love, putting the needs and desires of our spouse above our own should be the goal of our marriages.

In our loving and serving one another, we also admonish and exhort our spouses (Rom. 15:14; Heb. 3:13; 10:25). Because a wife is uniquely positioned to see the spiritual needs of her husband, she should lovingly address those needs, following the Ephesians 4:15 model of speaking the truth in love. How we communicate and what we communicate are both important. Throughout Ephesians 4, Paul warns believers what speech to avoid—that which is corrupt, malicious, deceitful, angry, and bitter—and exhorts us toward truthful, gracious, edifying, and kind words. When we focus on kindness and truthfulness, we can encourage mutual sanctification.

As anyone who's been married for more than a week can attest, none of us have married Prince Charming or Snow White, and we are going to annoy each other. Thus we need to forbear one another, with longsuffering (Eph. 4:2). Forbearing means bearing with one another, especially when provoked, or abstaining from resentment. A husband may forget an important date, park in her spot, or buy the wrong bread. Our familiarity with our spouse can also breed resentment over matters that may be outside his or her control—a career demand, a personality trait. These factors may irritate or hurt us, and we likely need to communicate about them to develop positive solutions, but in the midst of that, we must forbear the imperfect human nature that gave rise to these irritations.

Continued on page 35

FORBEARING MEANS BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER, ESPECIALLY WHEN PROVOKED, OR ABSTAINING FROM RESENTMENT.



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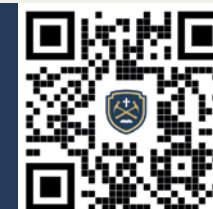
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John's Testimony to Deity: The "I AM" Statements of Jesus

Readers of John are very familiar with the seven "I am" statements of Jesus recorded only in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life"; "I am the light of the world"; "I am the door"; "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the resurrection and the life"; "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; "I am the vine." These are called the *predicated* "I am" statements ("I am" + predicate). But there are also seven *non-predicated* or *absolute* "I am" statements in John. As a group of seven, these generally receive less attention; several of them are camouflaged by translation, often by the insertion of an assumed understood pronoun not in the original text ("I am he"). The stand-alone Greek expression *egō eimi* ("I am" with no predicate) "is often the style of deity, especially in the Greek OT," as Leon Morris notes. We will not look at them in the order in which they appear in John, an approach whose rationale will become apparent. In what follows, translations include my own modifications which illustrate the interpretational issues under discussion.

8:24—"If ye believe not that **I am** (*egō eimi*), ye shall die in your sins." Most translations insert a predicate ("I am **he**") that is not in the text. But that raises a question: Who is the "he" He was claiming to be? The Jews pick up on the initial ambiguity of His statement, and this is precisely what they want to know, too: "Who art thou?" (8:25). Jesus' reply is oblique: "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning" (8:25). He had just told the Jews that He, unlike them, is "from above" and "not of this world" (8:23). Is Jesus' "I am" a potentially veiled way of identifying Himself as the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14? As the conversation continues, the ambiguity gradually dissipates, until in 8:58 they get the message loud and clear. Commenting on Jesus' use of "I am" in this passage, Morris suggests, "We should probably understand it along the lines of the similar expression in LXX, which is the style of deity (cf. Is. 43:10)." That is why Jesus can assert such dire consequences—to reject Him means certain death in their sins (8:21, 24).

8:28—"When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that **I am**." Again, most translations insert an assumed pronoun ("I am **he**"), even though there is no clear antecedent in the context. (To say the antecedent is "the Son of man" seems awkward and overly obvious.) Once more, if you keep reading all the way to the end of the interchange, it seems clear that Jesus' expression here is quite purposeful; He is going somewhere with this language. Also, there is no second "that" in the verse, so the rest of the verse should be translated as a separate thought, not a continuation of

what they would know ("then shall ye know that I am; and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.").

8:58—"Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, **I am**." Here the interchange finally comes to an unambiguous head. When the Jews insist that Jesus cannot compare to Abraham, Christ replies, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (8:56). The Jews understood that He was not referring to Abraham in heaven seeing Jesus' birth in Bethlehem; that would merely have implied Abraham's continuing life in heaven. They understood that He was implying His existence back in Abraham's day, because they scorned the absurdity that a man less than fifty could possibly have seen Abraham (8:57). But Christ is much older than they suppose. Indeed, before Abraham ever existed, Christ already was (8:58). "It should also be observed," notes Morris, "that He says 'I am,' not 'I was.' It is *eternity* of being and not simply" preexistence or antiquity of being "that the expression indicates."

Every translation appears to recognize the uniqueness of Jesus' claim in this passage; no translation adds a predicate pronoun ("I am **he**"). In my opinion, the obvious clarity of 8:58 settles the ambiguity of the two previous references (8:24, 28). It clinches the argument for an intentional echo of the OT designation for deity (cf. Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 45:18; 46:4). "I am" in this context represents the same claim and the same name as Yahweh in the OT. The Jews understood that He was claiming full equality and identity as God; that's why they attempted to stone Him (8:59).

13:19—"Now I tell you before it comes, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that **I am**." Again, the translations almost unanimously insert a pronoun ("I am **he**"), but there is no sensible antecedent in the context that is not grammatically awkward. Christ has just revealed to the Twelve that one of them would betray Him. When this unlikely prophecy comes true, He says, they will have ample evidence to believe that "I am" (Yahweh). This is followed by more language implying His equality with God (13:20).

18:5, 6, 8—"I am . . . I am . . . I have told you that **I am**." Again, almost all versions render these statements by adding a pronoun not in the text ("I am **he**"). Grammatically, it makes sense—except for one detail in the text. A mob arrived in the garden at night to arrest Jesus, announcing that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth. Christ responded, "I am." That sounds simple and innocent

enough. But John emphasizes that as soon as He spoke those very words—*egō eimi*, "I am"—a remarkable thing happened: *the entire group of armed soldiers drew back and fell to the ground*. Only one explanation is offered for the soldiers' peculiar reaction: it happened precisely when Jesus said the words "I am" (18:6).

Nonetheless, the opinions of interpreters are mixed. Morris suggests a very natural explanation: "it is possible that those in front recoiled from Jesus' unexpected advance, so that they bumped those behind them, causing them to stumble and fall." J. C. Ryle is thoroughly and emphatically convinced this is a miracle, but he thinks it very unlikely that the divine name is intentionally used and responsible for this effect. Andreas Köstenberger believes the expression "surely has overtones of the divine name 'I am,'" which, he says, is also apparent from the effect Jesus' words have on the soldiers, who drew back and fell to the ground, "as the Scriptures indicate is customary in the case of a theophany." D. A. Carson counters that "such theophanies do not depict the worshipper drawing back and falling to the ground." But these are not worshippers. This, it seems, is precisely the response to a theophany that one would expect from such an audience as the one that arrived to arrest Jesus. Nevertheless, Carson continues: "More important, if John is creating a theophany, he is painfully clumsy; in this view, the arresting officials experience a theophany as they gaze on Jesus and hear his words, and then proceed to arrest him anyway!" But if you have ever read Pharaoh's repeated resistance to obvious and unequivocal divine miracles, or Israel's continual unbelief and complaint in the ongoing theophanic presence of the pillar of cloud and fire, the idea that the soldiers, once they recovered from the experience, would proceed to do what they came for is neither unrealistic nor clumsily told. The NET Bible summarizes the event and its significance this way:

Perhaps this is what in fact happened on the scene [that they momentarily *retreated*]; but the theological significance given to this event by the author implies that more is involved. The reaction on the part of those who came to arrest Jesus comes in response to his affirmation that he is indeed the one they are seeking, Jesus the Nazarene. But Jesus makes this affirmation of his identity using a formula which the reader has encountered before in the Fourth Gospel, e.g., 8:24, 28, 58. Jesus has applied to himself the divine Name of Exod 3:14, "I AM." Therefore, this amounts to something of a theophany which causes even his enemies to recoil and prostrate themselves, so that Jesus has to ask a second time, "Who are you looking for?" This is a vivid reminder to the reader of the Gospel that even in this dark hour, Jesus holds ultimate power over his enemies and the powers of darkness because he is the one who bears the divine Name.

No other explanation satisfies the situation than that Christ was claiming to be Yahweh, and the force of the reality of His Person—consciously or unconsciously—momentarily overwhelmed His confronters in a kind of verbal transfiguration. The fact is that these were not Roman soldiers but the temple guard—Jews who knew the covenantal name of God. Any reluctance or doubt we might have regarding this explanation should be overcome by this point in John's Gospel; he has been preparing us for this conclusion by recording Jesus' other clear uses of this title (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). The progressively unambiguous statements above should condition us to be less skeptical regarding two earlier statements that are, in isolation from the others, perhaps initially less convincing.

4:26—"I am, who speaks to you" or "I am, the one speaking to you." In this case, there is an antecedent (Messiah) that would correspond to a predicate pronoun—if there were one; but there isn't. Is this a veiled claim to be not "merely" Messiah but the "I am" of the OT? Morris remarks, "It may be that we have here nothing more than a simple affirmation. On the other hand, the use of the emphatic pronoun in this expression is in the style of deity." Morris also cites Stauffer, who lists six reasons for affirming that Jesus' words are "to be understood as the theophanic formula There is no doubt that the evangelist wishes this to imply that Jesus pronounced the first significant, but as yet half-veiled, words concerning the secret of his person not in Judea or Galilee, but on that occasion in Samaria."

6:20—"I am; be not afraid." Once more, there is no antecedent or predicate, though the latter is routinely added in translation. Although Morris thinks that "here it is primarily a means of self-identification," he adds that "it is possible that His words are meant to give a hint of deity."

In view of what Christ will unmistakably imply with this phrase later in the book, John's careful preservation and progressively unambiguous repetition of this phrase, and John's penchant for sevens, it seems likely that these first two references are pregnant with a nascent inference of deity, which Christ would later make increasingly specific through the same terminology that is both theologically significant and thematically relevant to the heightened focus of John's Gospel on the deity of Christ.

Layton Talbert is professor of theology and biblical exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.



Great Loss or Great Gain

I was in Detroit just a few days ago, and residents were dealing with smoke from Canadian wildfires that was affecting the air quality in their area. Many *FrontLine* readers probably have seen the pictures of the devastating wildfires in California, including those that destroyed whole neighborhoods in the Los Angeles area. After a tornado or a flood, people are often seen going back through their belongings and sorting out what they will save and what they will throw out.

However, there is a phrase that is often used after a fire—**total loss**! What an accurate description of those who die without Christ. To die and go to hell is certainly a total loss. Additionally, 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 talks about another fire test.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

This is not a total loss, but it is a great loss. Verse 15 tells us we are saved, yet so as by fire. How do we end up in heaven with nothing but wood, hay, and stubble? I believe this happens when we live a selfish, self-absorbed life. If we actually believe that the majority of people are headed to total loss, can we really go through life doing nothing to reach them with the gospel?

In May of this year, two dads of college students who attend Faith passed away.

One of them died of a brain aneurysm and the other of a heart attack. No one saw either deadly event coming. One of the dads was a dairy farmer and the other was a pastor, but both went into eternity suddenly. I attended both funerals and went to both graveside services. As I went to the graveside and saw the coffin as it was about to be lowered, and as I saw the grief-stricken and heartbroken wife and kids, several things struck me.

First, as I saw the pain in both families, I realized the only thing that could make that worse would be if they did not know their husband/dad was in heaven. I assume that most who read these articles know for sure they are saved. However, if you are reading this and you do not know for sure if you were to die that you would go to heaven, don't put your family through the sorrow that would involve after you died. Don't pile on more grief because you suffered total loss. Trust Christ as your Savior and let Him pay for your sins by His death on the cross.

Second, what I saw at the graveside made me so thankful for my salvation. It reminded me what great news the gospel is. It seems that if we are not careful, sharing the gospel can become the task at hand instead of the wonder at hand. Is amazing grace still amazing to you? Do you still tear up when you take communion? Do you still get overwhelmed when you remember the body that was broken and the blood that was shed to pay for your salvation? Isn't it amazing to think that the moment you die, whether by a heart attack, brain aneurysm, or old age, you will step into heaven—not because of anything you have done but all because of what Christ has done? Someday I will be in that box at a gravesite—or at least that's where my body

will be, for I will already be in heaven. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Third, my time at the graveside reminded me how quickly a person can go into eternity. As I get older, I think more and more about that moment, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 3, when my works will be tried. I don't want to stand before God with nothing but smoke. I want there to be gold, silver, and precious stones. I also hope to look around and see people God used me to share the gospel with.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes often reminds us, this life is a vapor. We really don't have a lot of time to share the gospel. Paul reminds us of this in 2 Corinthians 5:18–21.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

May we be the ambassadors God wants us to be. May we not stand before God suffering great loss. May we receive gold, silver, and precious stones in part because we shared the Word with the world.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June 2015.



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STEWARDSHIP MATTERS

Corey A. Pfaffe

Giving Guidance

Milltown, Wisconsin (population 608). As a ten-year-old pastor's kid, I was the town paperboy—my first entrepreneurial adventure. Paperboys went house-to-house in those days, knocked on customers' doors, and hollered "COLLECT!" For the first time in my life, I had money.

I was excited about giving. My dad preached about tithing, and I thought that I knew how to calculate ten percent. But I was wrong. That first week, I collected \$30 and joyfully placed \$3 in the offering plate. Then a \$28 bill arrived from the St. Paul Pioneer Press. I learned a hard lesson about how entrepreneurs tithe.

We all need giving guidance that combines biblical principles with practical strategies. The apostle Paul guided New Testament Christians in his day to give "as God hath prospered" them (1 Cor. 16:2). As 2025 draws to a close, it's a great time to consider laws and regulations that guide tax-smart opportunities to give generously.

GIVE AS GOD HAS PROSPERED YOU

Let's revisit one key idea from our January-February 2025 Stewardship Matters article on giving.

My wife Laurie and I have always given at least ten percent of our increase to our local church's general needs. As employees earning a wage or salary, we gave more when we received a bonus or overtime pay—as God had prospered us.

But for entrepreneurs, systematic giving is trickier. Income often fluctuates, as I sadly learned as a young paperboy. Cash

may come in bursts, with weeks or months of little income.

Business owners can determine their giving based on profits—gross receipts minus operating expenses like materials or wages. What remains after these expenses represents how God has prospered them. Their family living costs and personal taxes are paid out of the portion that remains. But how can an entrepreneur tithe when the timing of sales is unpredictable?

Let's consider an example. A florist received \$100,000 in sales last year. Her expenses totaled \$60,000. She enjoyed \$40,000 in profits (40% of gross receipts). To start giving 10% of her increase, she could begin the new year by donating 4% of each sales deposit. This approach adjusts giving to match income: lower sales equal smaller gifts and higher sales equal larger gifts.

Entrepreneur, don't let this calculator exercise rob your joy in generosity (2 Cor. 9:7). But as 2025 ends, it can be a good time to revisit your giving record.

GIVE USING TAX-SMART STRATEGIES

Tax laws can be complex, but they offer opportunities for wise stewardship. US tax rules encourage generosity. Here are five strategies to consider. Consult your tax professional before acting, as this information is for educational purposes only.

New deduction for 2026. Starting January 1, 2026, married couples can deduct up to \$2,000 of charitable contributions without going the route of itemizing deductions

(singles, \$1,000). Good record-keeping could save couples at least \$240 in federal taxes, possibly much more.

Donor Advised Funds (DAFs). DAFs are ideal for years with high income and tax. You contribute to a DAF investment fund, claim an immediate tax deduction, and later *advise* the fund to make distributions to public charities. For example, a family with a \$50,000 windfall could donate all or a portion of it to a DAF, reducing taxable income now while supporting ministries over time. Caution: some DAF sponsors have processes that complicate giving to your local church.

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs). Retirees who are 70½ or older can transfer funds directly from their *traditional* Individual Retirement Accounts (not Roth accounts) to their churches or other not-for-profit ministries. This avoids income tax on the withdrawal. There are very few seniors who cannot improve their God-honoring stewardship by pursuing QCDs. For example, a \$1,000 IRA withdrawal donated directly as a QCD avoids \$150 or more in taxes. Retirees age 73+ are *required* by law to take Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from taxable IRAs. IRAs allow earners to reduce their taxes while saving for retirement. RMDs make them start to withdraw from IRA funds, paying back the tax they saved in earlier years. Unless needed for living expenses, directing RMDs as QCDs to charities avoids taxes and supports your ministries.

Gifts of appreciated stock. Donating publicly traded stock from non-retirement funds offers a "twofer." You avoid taxes on the stock's gains and may deduct its full value. For example, stock bought for \$5,000 but now worth \$15,000 can be donated, saving taxes on the \$10,000 gain and potentially deducting the full \$15,000. Perhaps your gift of stock could fund a church missions trip, a Christian literature initiative, or a scholarship fund to send children to Bible camp.

Charitable IRA bequests. Naming a charitable organization as an IRA beneficiary ensures funds go to it tax-free. Family members can inherit assets like bank accounts or property, which typically don't trigger income taxes, preserving more for both charity and heirs. Imagine the blessing to your church and the encouragement to other donors that a bequest of 50% of your IRA may produce.

Giving guidance helps employees, entrepreneurs and, yes, even paperboys. Discuss these ideas with your family, at your church or Christian ministry, and certainly with your trusted financial advisors.

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 served in various lay capacities as members of Calvary Baptist Church of Watertown for more than thirty-five years.

Your Spouse Is Your One Another Too

Continued from page 28

While forbearance promotes harmony in the home, forgiving one another (Col. 3:13) is how we deal with sin. Within marriage, we should be quick to confess our faults (James 5:16) and seek forgiveness. When one sins against his spouse, he should confess his sin and ask forgiveness. Then the spouse should forgive, following the biblical model of Matthew 18. Forgiveness helps us fight for our marriage rather than fighting within it. Forgiveness keeps a clean slate between husband and wife and helps prevent bitterness. We want the atmosphere of our home to be kind and gracious, not full of unconfessed sins and resentment.

Further, we demonstrate and grow our love for each other by praying for one another. While Scripture may not specifically command a wife to pray for her husband, the principles of Colossians 1:9 and Ephesians 1:16 indicate how appropriate it is for us to uphold our spouse in prayer. What an encouragement to know the person who loves me most prays for me! As we pray for each other, we focus on allowing God to work. A godly older lady once shared that instead of trying to change her husband, she asked God to do that work in his life. Once we make prayer for our spouse a regular practice, we see him or her more as God does. Prayer

empowers us to fulfill all the other "one another" commands.

In marriage, when we love, prefer, exhort, forbear, and pray for one another, both husband and wife can thrive. Our marriages aren't movies with a fade-to-black happily ever after, but they can be joyful, lifelong covenants that glorify God, sanctify us, and bless a world that needs to see what love truly looks like.

Traci Mayes is an online English professor with four adult children. She and her husband, Preston, have adjusted fairly well to empty-nest life and enjoy living in Minnesota with frequent visits to see children and grandchildren in Wisconsin. (Author photo by Morgan Brown)



* John Piper, "Love One Another with Brotherly Affection," <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/love-one-another-with-brotherly-affection>

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The World at Our Doorstep

Continued from page 26

my duty to God, since my family doesn't go to church?" or "What does God have to do with Scouting anyway?" Scouting chaplaincy is an opportunity to encourage youth and adults to seek and know God.

Like the military chaplaincy, Scouting chaplaincy occurs within a pluralistic environment. This requires the chaplain to accommodate each Scout's or adult leader's faith tradition, which is accomplished through referrals to an appropriate resource. Accommodation is consistent with one of the FBFI Chaplaincy Commission's core values: vigilance for religious liberty. Religious accommodation neither requires the chaplain to deny his or her biblical convictions, nor to affirm someone else's lifestyle, identity, or choices when they contradict biblical truth. Scouting chaplains may provide spiritual counseling when requested. The request is an important differentiator between evangelization and proselytization, the latter of which is inconsistent with both FBFI and Scouting America policies. When consulted by a Scout or adult leader on any topic, which could include homosexuality or transgenderism, an FBFI-endorsed chaplain should disclose his or her affiliation as a Baptist fundamentalist who adheres to biblical authority. The chaplain should ask the Scout or adult leader whether they want to hear the biblical response to their question. Seeking permission in a pluralistic environment expresses respect to the individual and reflects sensitivity to the thoughts, feelings, and practices of others without endorsing them. An effective Scouting chaplain is winsome, a patient

listener, and clearly interested in the other's well-being, thereby earning the opportunity to speak the truth in love.

Scouting chaplaincy affords a viable opportunity for laymen and laywomen to minister as volunteers. While seminary-trained ministers are certainly welcomed by the Scouting community, the chaplaincy needs usually outpace the supply, and spiritually-minded laypeople are readily embraced. It does help to have a Scouting background, but of all the community chaplaincy opportunities, Scouting is one of the easier communities to connect with. Scouting America provides training that allows any new volunteer to quickly engage with the program. And this community of volunteers understands that any service is being rendered as a fellow volunteer. A ministry opportunity is likely at your doorstep:

- Every Scouts BSA Troop in the country has the position of Chaplain, and many go unfilled, especially for troops chartered by civic organizations. To locate a troop in your area, visit <https://beascout.scouting.org/>.
- District or council events such as weekend camporees and week-long summer camps offer chapel services that need to be organized and delivered.
- Philmont Scout Ranch engages multiple chaplains during their summer seasons.
- National and World Jamboree events offer chaplaincy opportunities, typically every four years.

EQUIPPING VOLUNTEER CHAPLAINS

The opportunity for Scouting chaplaincy to be effectively served by laypeople underscores the urgency of biblical discipleship. There are needs at each of our doorsteps that laypeople can meet. Scouting chaplaincy is a field

white unto harvest. As we pray for laborers, may we also elevate our expectations for interpersonal and small group discipleship. Are we discipling others to effectively lead chapel services and to engage individuals seeking help? Seminary-caliber training may be an appropriate path for the Pauls in ministry, but the Great Shepherd is able to use even unlearned fishermen to seek and to save that which was lost.



SCOUTING AMERICA HISTORY

Scouting America was established in 1910 as the Boy Scouts of America. It has long been considered the gold standard for teaching life skills and for youth leadership development. Regardless of the national office's membership policy changes since 2012, a Scout's experience continues to derive primarily from the quality of the local leadership (i.e., the influence of the adults delivering and supporting their respective pack and troops, including chaplains). Some key policies remain unchanged, such as sexual abstinence as the standard of conduct for all Scouting youth, whether in uniform or out. Done right, Scouting is a program that can be used to grow boys (and now girls) into capable, responsible adults who are engaged in their communities. When that robust Scouting programming is supported by mature Christians, young people can also learn how to live out the Great Commandment, the Golden Rule, and the Great Commission within their respective spheres of influence.

Alan Ashley has been a Scouting volunteer since 2006 and is a recipient of the Baptist *Good Shepherd* and the *District Award of Merit* recognitions. Married since 1991, he and his wife have two grown children. Professionally, he administers employer-sponsored retirement plans.



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FBFI Chaplains Celebrate Army Chaplain Corps 250th Anniversary

Army chaplains from across the country gathered to celebrate their 250th anniversary over the last week of July. The Chaplain Corps Ball capped this memorable week at Fort Jackson and Columbia, South Carolina. FBFI chaplains were well represented. Chaplains Gary Fisher, Chris Melvin, Scott Bullock, Matt Sprecher, and Matt Sanders met July 29–August 1 at the Army's Institute of Religious Leadership (USA-IRL) to collaborate, plan, and fellowship.

The Army often gathers soldiers together for fun after working on a team-building event. First, the critical work—the Army Chief and Deputy Chief of Chaplains hosted the annual Religious Leader Symposium (RLS) at the USA-IRL. Chaplain (Major General) Bill Green invited all colonels to participate in a three-day think tank to gather, share, and create religious leader resources for our rapidly changing Army. These senior leaders discussed the most recent changes that are affecting the Army. The reality is that several commands are evolving and merging with others. Change is hard but necessary, so chaplains must adapt to effectively spread the gospel to the newest privates serving in eastern Europe, Korea, Japan, or a remote South Pacific island.

Command chaplains representing the Army's largest major organizations briefed their latest changing formations at the symposium. In my humble opinion, the best presentation came from our own CH (COL) Gary Fisher from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. The RLS addressed our ongoing mission to provide critical ministry in this challenging environment, and FBFI chaplains led the way from the briefing platform to various working groups.

During the RLS, four FBFI chaplains (Bullock, Fisher, Sprecher, and Melvin) met for sweet fellowship over Columbia's best burritos. Can former battle-deployed soldiers say *sweet*? Absolutely! This is when we catch up on our missions, family, and future ministry plans. But this uniformed comradery will soon pass for some. Time marches on as chaplains must hang up the uniform in retirement, and that is coming quickly for me in late January.

When RLS adjourned, everyone went into formal social event mode at the 250th *Chaplain Corps & Regimental Association Birthday Ball*. It was a high-energy evening to remember. Nearly 800 chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists, both active and retired, gathered to celebrate our heritage and future as missionaries to the Army. Our Chief of Chaplains introduced the guest speaker, General Brunson, United States Forces Korea (USFK) Commander, who encouraged all to remain faithful to our gospel mission and calling to bring God to soldiers and soldiers to God. Prayers rang out for divine grace and wisdom to sustain our Army and its chaplains for years to come. I sure need that. I know all our FBFI Army chaplains yearn for it.



Chaplains Matt Sanders, Scott Bullock, Matt Sprecher, Chris Melvin

The Ball highlighted Army chaplain history going back to July 29, 1775. The Chaplain Corps traces its lineage to General George Washington's plea to the Continental Congress to fund chaplains in the Continental Army shortly after Lexington and Concord. We are one of the oldest branches in the US military. The official program stated that from its birth, "the Corps was created to meet the spiritual and moral needs of soldiers, providing religious support and counsel during times of peace and conflict."

The 800 strong were reminded that the Chaplain Corps significantly evolved over the 20th century, especially during the World Wars. Chaplain Assistants, now Religious Affairs Specialists, were officially recognized in December 1909. Chaplains served in every theater of conflict, often under fire, ministering to soldiers from across the USA. Recently, chaplains have served in complex operations including humanitarian missions to counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, over 1,500 chaplains serve in the Regular Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard. They offer pastoral counsel, religious services, moral and ethical leadership, and suicide prevention training to soldiers and their families.

Chaplains Matt and Ginger Sprecher and Scott and Kara Bullock donned formal attire and represented the FBFI at the ball. We toasted our wives, Commander in Chief, Chaplain Corps, and fallen comrades with South Carolina sweet tea, then fellowshiped with numerous other chaplain brothers serving in the profession of arms from endorsing agencies of like faith. We prayed to faithfully live our motto, *Pro Deo et Patria—For God and Country*. Amen.

Scott Bullock completes his active service in January 2026 at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, at the Institute of Religious Leadership. He retires after nearly 28 years and 9 months of federal commissioned service. You will probably find him next in Greenville, South Carolina, serving at his local church, loving on his extended family, and nursing his sore shoulder on the golf course.



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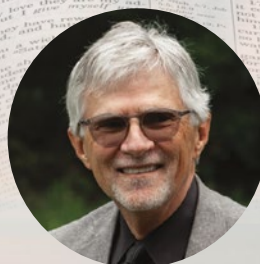
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